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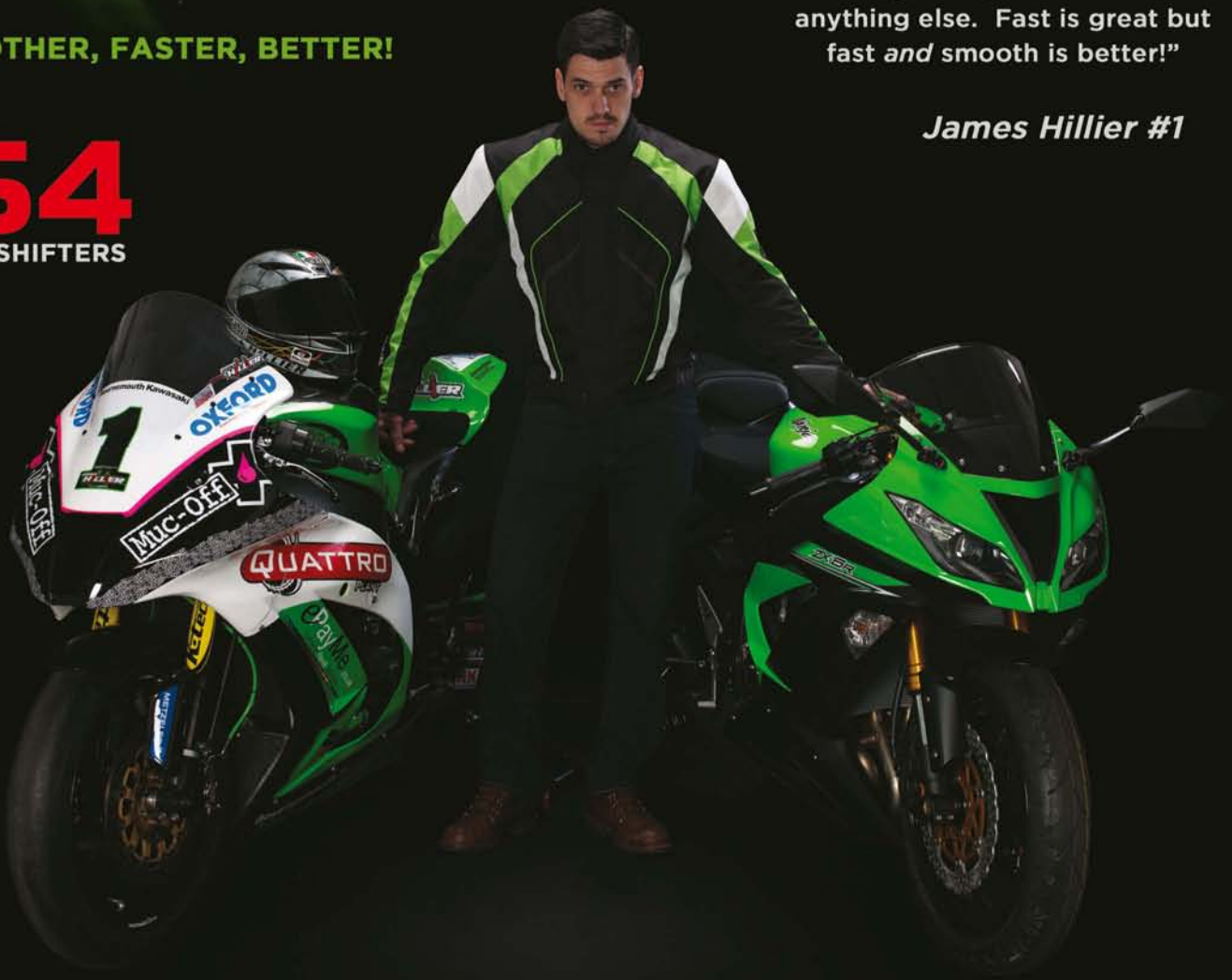

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THE EDITOR

I bought the magazine this month. When I joined SuperBike in 2010, a huge publishing house owned it. There were hundreds of busy journalists everywhere, keeping busy on various magazines. I loved working there, it felt like we mattered to the company. It turned out that we didn't matter that much and in the five years since, the magazine has passed through various hands, some with more honest intentions than others. No matter how hard things got, the magazine always came together. Somehow, in all the confusion and chaos and machine gun emails from management, the boys on the ground managed to put a quality magazine together. In recent times, the goalposts sped up their dance and yet still the magazine came together. If you ever meet a motorcycle journalist and they tell you their job is easy, they're talking shit or they're lazy. I've worked doors, collected rubbish, lugged bricks in the snow on building sites, invaded entire countries on foot and spent a brief period of my life making roof tiles in a Victorian factory. None of those things have been anywhere near as challenging as putting a magazine together when the chips are down. Don't get me wrong, it's not all bad, but it's certainly not always easy and I appreciate the guys that I work alongside, they deserve a mention. I first met Alan Dowds when I was a brand new staff writer at Two Wheels Only magazine. We travelled to Italy to see Spidi's new range of toot. We laughed, we drank Grappa like it was water and he tried to give me €100 to sleep with a man. If there's a chap out there with more journalistic integrity and intelligence, that can ride as dangerously as Mr. Dowds, I've yet to meet him. Then there's Chris. I didn't know when I first met him that he was as good on a bike as he clearly is. The first time we rode together was at Brands in the snow. I was on a Z750 and decided I'd show this little spunker what's what round what is now clearly his favourite track. To be fair, I dropped him off for a bit, even Chris said he was surprised at my pace. Then I tucked the front at about 75mph. I saved the bike but wrote my left boot off taking a dab at motorway speeds. Since then we've done nothing but laugh together and work hard together. Both amazing men, it has been my privilege to hold them up on the road. So, what now? For various reasons, I'm going to take the magazine online only. Making you wait weeks and weeks for something that you can read or watch as it happens just doesn't make sense anymore. I'm not expecting an easy ride over the next six months, but it's not like I've had an easy one up until now and I'd appreciate your continued support. It wont cost you any money and if you're owed money on your subscription, we'll be in touch to sort refunds. All I ask for is your time and continued dedication. Join us on Facebook and Twitter, take the time to sign up to the weekly email and you'll be able to carry on enjoying the party on what I'm hoping will be as defining a website as we've been a magazine. Evolve or die, it's that simple.

John Hogan, Editor john@superbike.co.uk

P68: The Transformer boys give us a spin on their uniqueMoto2 project racer.

EDITORIAL

EDITOR John Hogan john@superbike.co.uk
DEPUTY EDITOR Chris Northover chris@superbike.co.uk
GRAPHIC DESIGN Steve Dawson
WSB COLUMNIST James Whitham james@superbike.co.uk
BSB COLUMNIST Stuart Higgs stuart@superbike.co.uk
TECH & SPELLING Alan Dowds alan@alandowds.com

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ADVERTISING

ADVERTISING MANAGER
Toni Cole 01926 339 808 tonic@blazepublishing.co.uk

PUBLISHING

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ASSISTANT PUBLISHER: Ruth Burgess
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I rang Babestation last night,

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girl said "Hi, how can I help?"

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I said "effin hide! I've lost the remote

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and my bird's coming down the stairs"

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THE BIG PICTURE

I AM MARQUEZ, FEAR ME!

ST JORDI ARENA, BARCELONA. DECEMBER 2014.
Is there anything Marc Marquez can't do on a bike? More importantly for him, is there any race on two wheels that he wont fight tooth and nail to win? Judging by his emphatic win at the Superprestigio, we're going to say no. Drink it in, the man has got skills for days.
Image:2Snap

THE BIG PICTURE

"BEING RESTRICTED TO AN A2 LICENSE AIN'T SO BAD."

KTM RC 390 ROAD TEST, 1PM, DECEMBER, SOMEWHERE IN SURREY

The thought of being restricted to 46hp for a few years might seem like a prison sentence before you've had a chance to do anything wrong, but with bikes like this you'll still be hooked. Have a look at our first ride of the RC 390 and tell us you wouldn't.

YOU WHAT?

Taylor Mackenzie @TaylorMac77 - Jan 7

Super pumped for the 2015 season, it's going to be so rad, I'm stoked.

FRONT END

NEWS
NEW BIKES
PEOPLE
EVENTS
FIRST RIDES

APRILIA RSV4 RR

We missed the deadline on this last month, but here's our take on the updated RSV4RR for 2015

It's one of our favourite bikes – indeed, it's our favouritest superbike of all. So you could probably argue that Aprilia's RSV4 was least in need of an update for next year. But with Yamaha's new R1M and the Kawasaki H2R soaking up all the acclaim at the bike shows, Aprilia clearly didn't fancy resting on its laurels. In fact, when you look at the press pack for details on the updates, the folk from Noale have actually pulled a bit of a blinder. No fewer than 16 extra ponies are now making their disorderly way to the 200-section rear SuperCorsa, thanks to a serious update to the engine internals. Lighter parts – your titanium valves, slimmed-down con-rods, redesigned heads – help the beastie rev even higher, while updated cams, inlet ducts, injectors and airbox improve the burn. Nearly 17 bhp is a beefy amount of extra power for a mid-life bump, especially in these austere times – but we're more than happy to take it!

Elsewhere, the APRC electronic rider aids package is improved all round, and is claimed to be a second-generation system. The chassis gets a longer swingarm, and overall mass is down by a claimed 1.5kg. Aprilia is also offering an optional circuit pack' of forged aluminium rims and Ohlins suspension. Nice.

In addition to the RR, there will be a limited edition 'RF' version, aimed purely at racers and track fans. Only 400 will be built, and they get special paint as well as the Ohlins and forged wheels as standard. Get your deposit down soon...

CAGIVA

Could lost Italian brand be on the way back?

With (relative) financial stability and sales success sweeping the Italian bike industry, rumours are rife that one of the greatest lost brands of recent times could be on the way back. Cagiva – the original marque set up by the Castiglioni family, has been off the radar for several years now, after turbulent finances and lack of investment left it without any bikes to sell. But with parent company MV Agusta forging ahead with new models, and new investment from Mercedes, industry insiders are speculating that Cagiva could find itself back in business, giving Agusta a more mainstream 'volume' brand to go alongside its premium bike business.

Agusta boss Giovanni Castiglioni has big plans for MV – including a massive expansion in the number of models, with plans for 26 different bikes by 2018. And while the firm is extending its range down into the premium light touring market with the Stradale 800 (see page 54 for launch report), Castiglioni is adamant that the MV brand won't move into entry level or budget models, instead remaining as a luxury marque.

So where does that leave Cagiva? There's been no Cagiva bikes built since 2012, when the long-running Mito 125 finally ended production. Larger Cagiva models like the Raptor 650 and 1000 haven't been built since the late 2000s, after supplies of their Suzuki engines dried up. But with investment in factory, dealer networks and international supply chains, it could make sense for MV Agusta to have a sister brand, using the synergies from MV's expansion to power Cagiva back onto the market. Agusta's 675 and 800cc triple engines would lend themselves well to retuning and use in a range of cheaper roadsters, in the Raptor mould. And Cagiva has plenty of experience of repurposing other firm's engines for its own uses, so would a Japanese 300cc engine in a Mito-type chassis be such a long shot?

MV bosses are tight-lipped about Cagiva: indeed Giovanni Castiglioni has played down the idea in public. But behind the scenes, there are big ideas for the old family firm.

CAGIVA HISTORY

Cagiva was set up as an industrial parts manufacturer in the 1950s by Giovanni Castiglioni, the current CEO's grandfather. In 1978, the firm turned to motorcycles, and bought its Varese factory from Harley-Davidson/AMF. Through the 1980s and 90s, it used Ducati (also owned by Castiglioni) V-twin engines in bikes like the Elefant and Gran Canyon, as well as making its own 125cc two-stroke sportsbikes.

By the late 1990s, charismatic owner Claudio Castiglioni had sold off Ducati and Moto Morini, and turned his attention to MV Agusta, launching the incredible 750ccc F4 Oro. Meanwhile, Cagiva had moved from Ducati to Suzuki motors, borrowing the TL1000 and SV650 powerplants to use in the Raptor roadsters and Navigator adventure bike. The Mito 125 was a Cagiva stalwart throughout this period, its crazy two-stroke engine powering many a teenage fantasy, until ratcheting emissions regs finally killed it off.

Cagiva also punched far above its weight in racing. Eddie Lawson and John Kocinski both won 500GP races on the firm's 500GP bike, with Kocinski finishing an amazing third in the 1994 championship. There was also offroad success: Edi Oriolo on a Cagiva Elefant won the Dakar in 1990 and 1994, and the firm took two 125MX titles in the 1980s.

R&G DATALOGGER

New GPS-based datalogging kit has lean sensor and G-force detector

Engineering firm R&G Racing is best known for its excellent crash protection kit. But the Hampshire firm is expanding its remit to include more and more aftermarket bits – including this new datalogging unit. The SpeedAngle GMOS JI100 might have a ropey name, but it's got a decent spec for the cash. The heart of the unit is a GPS-based datalogger, that uses satellite positioning technology to measure position and time, and from that it extrapolates speed, acceleration, G-force and lap times. The unit also has a separate sensor package that adds lean angle, as well as an external GPS aerial for improved satellite reception. There's a clear LCD display on the main unit, showing lean angle, speed, acceleration. It can also be customised to show whatever parameters you're most interested in. The data can be downloaded via USB at the end of a ride, and you can overlay the data onto Google Maps for later analysis.

For £299.99, it looks like a useful bit of kit. More info: www.rg-racing.com

WHEEL MEET AGAIN

We've fallen in love with the super-sweet spoked rims which adorn MV Agusta's Dragster 800RR. So much so, that we made it our mission to find out more about them. Turns out they're a brand called 'Kineo', and are made by Italian firm In-Motion. In-Motion was set up by former Aprilia race engineer Giulio Bernardelle, who's also headed up development at the Pramac Honda and Konica Minolta Honda MotoGP teams.

The Kineo wheels project aims to produce wire-spoked rims that are custom designed for use with modern tubeless tyres, and use forged aluminium hubs with CNC machined spoke holders. Spokes are stainless, and the wheels come in a range of fitments for loads of current naked, adventure and even superbikes.

Best of all, the Kineo importer for the UK is our old mates at HPS. Check them out at www.bikehps.com

PIPE DREAMS 1

German twin meets beautiful new Japanese partner

Back in the day, you'd struggle to find Yoshimura making parts for many bikes without a Suzuki sticker on the tank. But times are changing, and the Japanese pipe-masters are expanding their range outwards and upwards to suit! So feast your eyes on this sweet Hepta-Force carbon silencer from Yoshimura Japan, for the R1200GS. Spotted on the Performance Parts stand at the NEC bike show, it's part of a new range of Yosh parts aimed at non-sports bikes. "We're looking to bring the same high quality and top performance to naked and adventure bikes as Yoshimura has for decades with sports bikes," said Performance Parts boss Colin Peabody. We say 'more of this please!'.

Carbon Hepta-force silencer, £605, www.performanceparts-ltd.com

PIPE DREAMS 2

I don't know, you wait years for a news story about adventure bike exhausts – then two come at once. Okay, this natty SC-Project slip-on end can is for a KTM Super Duke 1290, which is more insane hyper-naked than adventure bike, but you get the drift.

SB's resident photographic artist Phil Steinhardt is currently slumming it round Surrey on his very own 1290, bought and paid for by honest toil. But we've dragooned him into trying out an end can from the good folks at SC-Project exhausts. This titanium Conic silencer slips on in a trice, saves a stack of weight over stock, and is (fairly) road legal, so Phil won't disturb the neighbours in his (very) leafy suburb. It's also on special at the moment, at €390 down from €550.

More on this when we get him to a dyno shop... In the meantime, check it out at www.sc-project.com.

CHEERS!

A belated thanks to Brian Nitto of 55 Productions for the Macau GP race photos we used last month. Sadly, the production dog ate his pic credit before we could paste it onto the pages. Gah. Check out more of Brian's awesome pics here! www.55productions.com

BLOODBIKES/PRESCOTT BIKE FEST OFFER

Bloodbikes/Prescott Bike Festival are offering 20% off entry tickets for all you lovely SuperBike readers, when quoting reference code: SB2015 and booking before 14th February. The Prescott bike fest is a great fun and relaxed event at Prescott Hill climb in Gloucestershire, packed with bikes and racing stars. You can even get a spin up the hill on your own bike, as a pillion or even passenger in a sidecar. Best of all, the event exists to support the Bloodbikes charity; volunteers who courier blood, breast milk and human organs to support the NHS outside of office hours. Point your computational device at www.prescottbikefestival.co.uk and see what's what. Discounted tickets £9.60 and under 16s go free.

There's no such thing as a dull day, just dull people. Put these dates in the diary, and you'll be more fun than a scream mask in Santa's grotto.

2015

24TH JAN

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WWW.MSVTRACKDAYS.CO.UK

4TH -7TH FEB

MOTOGP FIRST OFFICIAL TEST – SEPANG, MALAYSIA

While we've been stuffing cake, quaffing beer and moaning about the weather, the MotoGP elite have trained their hearts out to be ready for the 2015 season to kick off with the first official test in Sepang. Keep an eye on the website for live timing.
WWW.MOTOGP.COM

14TH MAR

SUPERMOTO TESTING – THREE SISTERS, WIGAN

Yes, we all know it's Chris' favourite past time and supermoto is still going strong in the North of the UK. This is the British Championship pre season test and is well worth a watch, or preferably a go if you can dig out a bike. Chris says it's the best fun on two wheels. Everyone else agrees, except the kick-starting bit…
WWW.NORASPORT.CO.UK

26TH MAR

BSB OFFICIAL TESTING – DONINGTON PARK, DERBYSHIRE

The first UK run out for the British Superbike teams takes place up at Donington Park. Definitely worth bunking off work for midweek, and it's not a bad ride out to Donny too.
WWW.MSVRACING.COM

12TH APRIL

PRESCOTT BIKE FEST – PRESCOTT HILL CLIMB, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

A relaxed bike show based around the Prescott Hill climb, with exhibitors, hundreds of bikes on display and a bunch of famous riders including that Foggy bloke. And you'll get a chance to have a run up the hill climb too if you fancy it.
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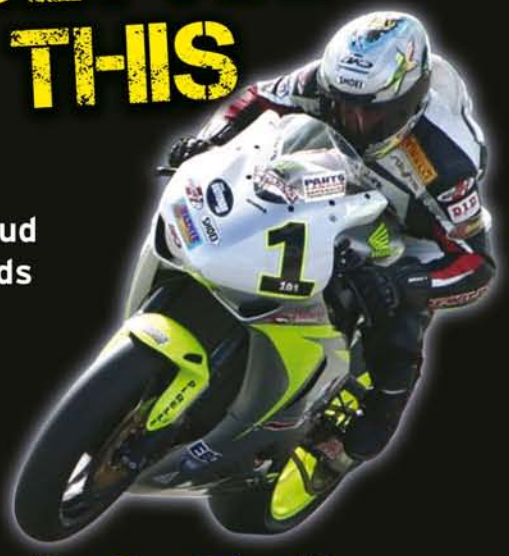

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WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?

Furygan flew us out to France with the promise of supermoto, flat track and a go on Johann Zarco's Moto2 bike. Things didn't go to plan, but the Transfiormer boys stepped in and gave us a spin on their unique Moto2 project racer.

Words: Chris Northover **Pics:** Furgygan

People (well, some people) are always (well, some of the time) harping on about how Moto2 has provided a breeding ground for the advancement of motorcycle chassis technology. Well I call bullshit. New technology huh? So how come they're all using copycat aluminium beam frames (with the exception of a couple of steel trellis numbers) with conventional forks and normal silhouettes? How come there are no mad-cap leading-link front ends, recliner riding positions, air shocks or carbon monocoques floating around? The trouble with racing, particularly Moto2, is that it's really, really competitive and everyone wants to win.

Hossack-style front end revealed

"It ain't easy to innovate in racing, particularly at the level of Moto2, which is why we tend to see incremental improvements and developments, rather than wild advances."

It's expensive too, so you have to get sponsors. Sponsors like lots of media coverage to get good exposure from their investment. The majority of media coverage goes to those riders up the pointy end. You with me? Now imagine you've got two options for a chassis – a proven, competitive package that has already won races for other teams, or an unproven new design that hasn't been tried before. Do you take the gamble? Are your sponsors going to back you with that gamble? Will they still back you when you're mid-pack halfway through the season because testing restrictions have held you back from developing the idea? How about when your rider crashes and says he had no feel from the front end because it doesn't feel like the bikes he's grown up racing for the last ten years? It ain't easy to innovate in racing, particularly at the level of Moto2, which is why we tend to see incremental improvements and developments, rather than wild advances. But in spite of all that, one team fielded a bike at three rounds of the 2014 Moto2 world championship with an unconventional front suspension and frame design. They finished 18th, 31st (after an incident) and DNF'd the final round. But the very fact they made it onto the grid and were able to be competitive in such a

close

WHAT'S THE POINT?

The suspension design used on the Transfiormer Moto2 bike is nothing new. It's a variation on the system Norman Hossack has been pushing for years and the same concept as the Duolever system used on the BMW K1200S. There are various claimed and theoretic benefits to the system, including improved stiffness and control of desired flex. One of the biggest gains is in the stiction (static friction) under braking. When you brake really hard on a conventional fork, the inner and outer tubes are loaded against each other, increasing friction and preventing the fork absorbing bumps and weight transfer so effectively. The Hossack/Fior system greatly reduces that friction, in theory improving how well the fork reacts over bumps when braking and/or turning in. That's the theory, but it'll take a lot of development for it to catch up with the telescopic fork – riders like consistency and familiarity, so if you're not winning races, an unconventional component would be easy to point the finger at. Here's hoping the Transfiormer boys keep pushing on with their project and maybe score a few World championship points in 2015.

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO RIDE?

Well, cold if we're going off the six steady, damp laps I managed to squeeze in at the test. With conditions as they were, I was never really going to be able to deliver a full and thorough analysis of the system. But in between trying not to crash it, I was blown away by just how light and nimble the bike felt. Initially the front end felt a little high and awkward, but after a couple of wobbly laps, I started to trust it. Leaning someone's hand-built race bike over when it's freezing cold and damp requires either lots of feel from the front tyre, or lots of whiskey. With no alcohol to be seen, it can only be a well-designed and planted front end that let me get the sweet scrape of knee slider on French asphalt. The Moto2 bike that I feared would be awkward, harsh and determined to kill me, turned out to be light, nimble and confidence-inspiring in the shittiest of conditions. Was that down to the front suspension design? Maybe not entirely, but it certainly helped. We'll see if we can get a proper, warm sunny test lined up and find out for sure. Until then, keep your eyes peeled for the Transfiormer next year, it's a triumph of engineering over copycat racers for sure.

class is very special indeed. And at a press event where Johan Zarco's team hid their bike away in case one of the nasty journalists broke it on the cold, damp Alès race track, the Transfiormer race team stepped in to save the day.

Transfiormer, that's Fior as in the late Claude Fior – long time French stalwart of race bikes with funny front ends. Christian Boudinot, who first got involved with Fior at the Hockenheim round of the 1987 European championship, masterminds the Transfiormer project. Boudinot rode a 250cc Rotax-powered bike built by Claude with a double-wishbone front end. He missed free practice, put it on pole in qualifying and then ended up fourth in the race after a broken oil tank poured its contents over the rear tyre and he crossed the line with both feet on the floor. Despite the calamities and the fact that the bike was still being finished while everyone was out in FP1, it showed real potential. Over the years, Fior developed several race bikes with this front end, including a 500cc inline-four two-stroke as well as designing frames for French manufacturer Boxer. Claude Fior died in a plane crash in 2001.

Christian eventually turned his hand to spinning the spanners on GP bikes, helping out Randy de Puniet, among others. When the Moto2 class cropped up, the ol' cogs started spinning and the plan to have a crack at modern GP racing with an alternative chassis design re-emerged. You know what comes next don't you, the lack of funds, small team, high expense bit. Well, all credit to the team, it built a bike with FTR chassis elements and an aluminium front end formed by hand on wooden dies, then welded together. Mike Di Meglio helped develop the bike, before Lucas Mahias stuck it 10th in the final round of the 2012 Spanish Moto2 Championship. With further development, the team plucked up the courage, confidence and resources to enter three rounds of the World championship in 2014, the results of which you already know. But the results paint a pessimistic picture of what the team has actually achieved. The guys have taken a different approach to motorcycle suspension design, developed it, made it competitive and finished in the top 20 of one of the most competitive classes in the world. What's more, it's a class where everyone has the same engine, so the chassis is the most critical area to gain an advantage. Who cares where they finish, they've achieved a hell of a lot already; somebody get that man a beer.

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2014 Season

Who the hell is...

RORY SKINNER

Meet the 13-year-old kid from Perth in Scotland who's going to be in the MotoGP paddock with Marquez and Rossi next year...

We've all spent a top year watching Marc Marquez doing the business this season. If only Britain had a young kid like that, eh? Brought up on Mini-moto tracks since he could walk, come through the race ranks winning as he goes. If only...

Of course, the last thing we'd want to do is heap unreasonable expectations on too-young shoulders. But to be honest, Rory Skinner seems well up for it. We met the 13-year-old on the Bennetts stand at the NEC, where he was celebrating two non-circuit-based victories: Bennetts' 'Search for a Star' competition, and grabbing a place on the legendary Red Bull MotoGP Rookies Cup for 2015 – which will see him racing at selected Euro rounds of MotoGP.

So how did a slight, crazy-haired schoolboy from Perth in Scotland get here? The hard way it turns out: racing Mini-moto round Britain – and winning – from the age of six, with the help of his bike shop owner dad, Mike.

"I started racing bikes when I was six, but I got my first bike when I was three," said Rory. "It was a little Yamaha PW50, I've still got it. I used to go over to my friend's place where they had some land, we used to go there every Sunday. I've been brought up around racing, as soon as I was born, I was really around bikes all the time."

Rory's dad fills in the gaps. "He first got a wee wooden balance bike, similar to the Kiddimoto. And he soon worked out if he went faster and faster, he could lift his feet and off he went. And I think that kickstarted his passion. Obviously he was round the paddock a lot with me and his mum when I did a bit of club racing. His balance was just so good, when he got his first pedal bike at four, he was straight on it, no stabilisers at all.

"By the time he was cycling on his pushbike, he was asking 'when can I start racing dad?' So we got him the PW50, and I

> **" Seven was the age limit for racing, but because he had good experience, he got a tryout at the Mini-moto track at six, and they said he was good to go"**

made up some stabilisers for it. They lasted about four sessions before he hit a post and knocked one off, so I just left it. And after another couple of sessions, I took the other one off...

"Seven was the age limit for racing, but because he had good experience, he got a tryout at the Mini-moto track at six, and they said he was good to go, so he was riding Mini-moto from aged six."

So quite a different route from most UK racers, who tend to spend their pre-teen riding careers off-road?

"He never did any offroad really, his PW50 was just used on bits of flat grass at Perth horse race track. No jumps or anything. I mean offroad is great, but it is awfully easy to get injured there. Once he got on the Mini-moto there was no looking back he just went from strength to strength."

And what strength. In 2010, aged eight, he was the Scottish Junior Mini-moto Champion, British Junior Mini-moto Champion and British Junior Production Mini-moto Champion. The following year he retained the British titles, and added the British GP50 Metrakit title.

Those early years were hard on the whole family though. " The first few years, we were trailing down south a lot, keeping three bikes going," said Mike. "We'd end up pulling up outside the circuits about 5:30am, the gates were still locked, so they'd open the gates, we'd get in and have an hours' kip and be up for 9am for practice. Then after the racing on Sunday, we'd get packed up and drive all the way back up to Perth! Lots of work and lots of hours, but worth everything. If the kids are doing good at something, you just do everything in your power to make it happen. And we're lucky we have good friends who've helped out too."

The gruelling weekend schedule actually helped Rory find a novel sponsor though – the local chippie, Perth's Fish and Chip Co. "I'd have full shifts all week

at the bike shop," said Mike. "Then finish on Friday, load up the van and head south. There wasn't much time for food, so we'd quite often pop in for a chippy tea." The folk at the chip shop became interested and eventually chipped(!) in with some sponsorship...

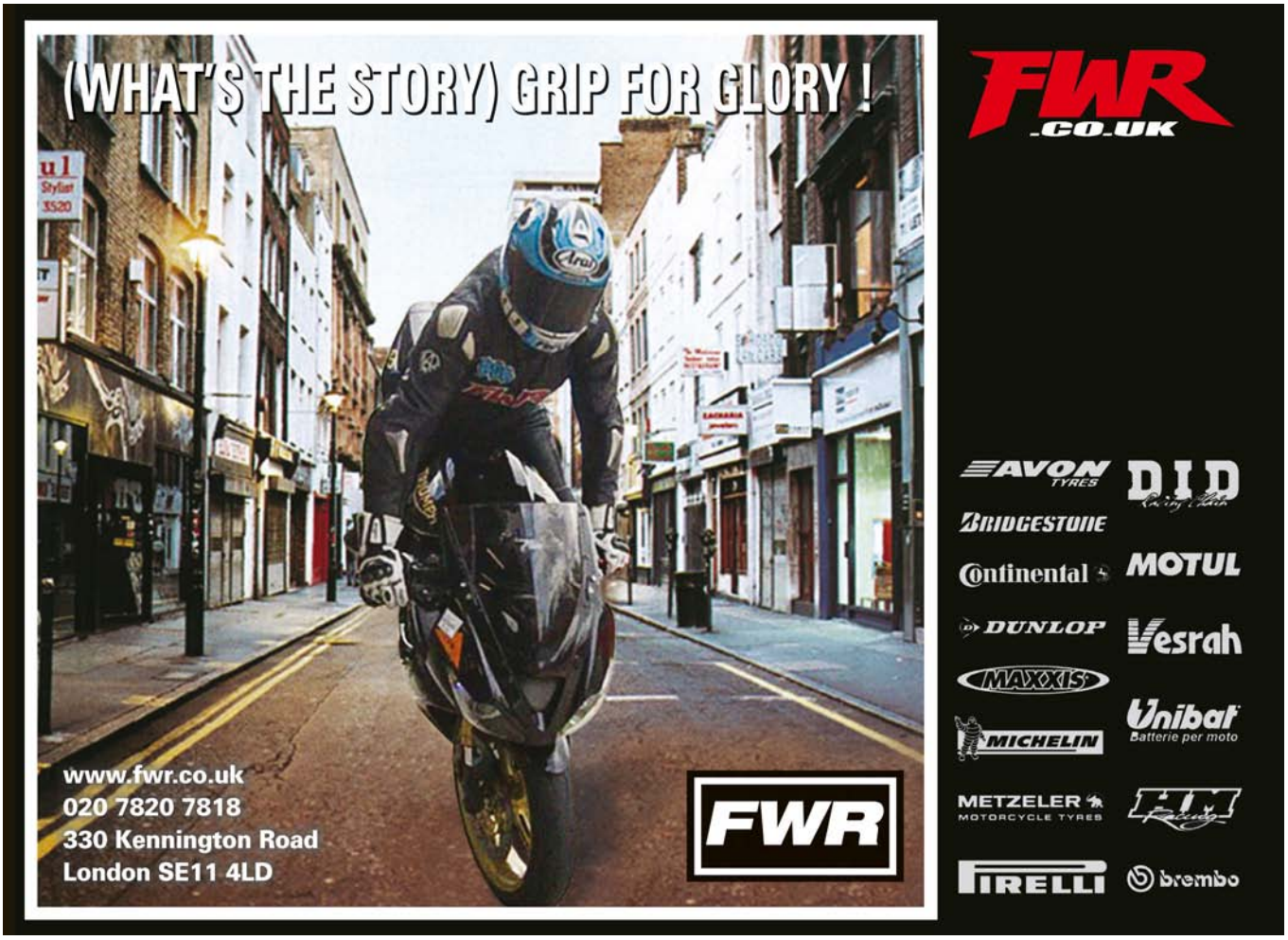
By 2012, Rory was clearly flying, and he won the British GP70 Metrakit title – a title which normally gets the winner straight onto either a Formula 125 bike, or a GP80. The only problem for Rory was that he was too young! "I was only 10 when I won the Metrakit 70 title, but you have to be 12 to run a 125 or 80 anywhere in Britain. We thought we had nothing to lose, so we put in an application to the Scottish ACU and they passed it! I think they all agreed on it quite quickly in the end. I was really happy, and so we had to sit down to decide whether to go for the 125 like Aprilia or the 80 that my dad built. We called it the Herbie – because it was a Honda chassis with a Derbi engine in it."

Rory dealt with his 80cc Herbie in much the same way as before, winning three F125 championships in 2013 on it, still just aged 11. That took him into 2014, for a 125cc ride at last, and another title – the 2014 Dunlop Aprilia Superteen championship. That's a title with a load of big names on it, from Casey Stoner and Cal Crutchlow to Scott Redding, Sam Lowes and Tom Sykes. He also managed his first ride on a four-stroke in the Moriwaki Cup rounds at Brands Hatch and Assen BSB meets. "Brands was his first time on a four-stroke, and his first time at Brands," said Mike. "He was running in second all the way round, then on the last lap he lost the front at Paddock Hill, saved it, but ended up fifth. Then at Assen he got a podium, which was pretty awesome."

But perhaps the biggest event of 2014 was passing selection for the Red Bull Rookies MotoGP support series. Mike again: " He was lucky he got through selection for the Rookies. You have to send in your results from whatever racing you've been at each month. And in September they emailed to say you've been picked out of over 1,000 entries. There were 109 riders at Donington, and they were looking to pick 12. Each day they whittled the numbers down, and Rory was one of them..."

So can Rory believe he's going to be riding in the MotoGP paddock next year? "No! I'm only 13, and so it's so hard to believe that I'm going to be round the worlds greatest riders, the pinnacle of two-wheeled motorsport. It's quite amazing to think I'll be there next year."

We think it's pretty amazing too. Get behind Rory for 2015 at www.roryskinnerracing.com.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BOXING CLEVER

The R1200R could be the all the bike you never knew you wanted. John hitched a ride in Spain to check it out

Words: John Hogan **Pics:** BMW

It's been a busy year for BMW. Without screaming and shouting about it they've introduced five new models and upgraded all of their existing ones in some way or another. The intention is simple, to maintain their position as a global leader in the premium segment. The figures speak for themselves, 116000 bikes sold globally this year already (over half of which had Boxer motors), with a month of sales time left to go before the year is out. They've surpassed last years sales figure with time to spare, just imagine how many more bikes they could have sold had they not underestimated the popularity of the fancy pants RnineT.

Sitting alongside the NineT in the boxer line up is this, the new R1200R. The previous version never really caught my attention, it seemed to be a bike designed to appeal to traditional BMW customers of old, which meant it was pretty dull. That said, BMW managed to find homes for fifty thousand units since 2006. If anyone is writing a thesis about brand loyalty over brand excitement, you can have that one on me.

The new R1200R comes at a time when BMW's image has been through a fairly radical internal shake up. A few years ago a BMW launch meant sharp suits, corporate chitchat and timekeeping that'd make a watchmaker proud. BMW seem to have recently embraced the fact that they are a business full of bikers and bike fans. From the top down, trainers, tattoos and IPhones full of street trackered R80s punctuate the corporate focus and the fastidious timekeeping. BMW are nailing it.

Like the RNineT, the R1200R first hit our radar in the form of a concept bike. Clearly and cleverly inspired by the current Café Racer trend, Concept Roadster certainly grabbed my attention. Of course the production bike would be a sanitized version, but the same people that designed one designed the other and its clear that the production bike is a close relative of the concept.

So, what exactly is the R12R? After a day of bazzing about the mountains above Benidorm, it's clearly bugger all like the old version. Designed with everyday use in mind, the new roadster is supposed to be the bike that you'd be happy touring, commuting or getting your Sunday morning squirt on. With that in mind, there are three variants available, all of which share the same double overhead camshaft 1170cc Boxer motor (two pistons punching at nine and three o'clock rather than six to twelve like convention dictates). Traditionally air cooled, but more recently with added liquid cooling to reduce thermal stress, the motor produces 125 character packed horsepower at 7750rpm and 125Nm of torque at 6500. The platform is based around a steel trellis frame, upside down forks (which allow neater packaging of the radiator in comparison to a Telelever front end) plus the EVO Paralever single sided swing arm. Travel at both ends is 140mm. Standard fitment on all three variants are radial mount four piston brakes equipped with ABS (which can be switched off) and ten spoke light alloy wheels. Like the forks, the inspiration for the brake and wheel combination came from the RR series. There are smaller parts shared across the three bikes you can choose from, but from here on in the levels of standard fit equipment differ according to your choice and their price point.

First up is the basic version, this is the one that makes the most sense if commuting is top of your to do list. Available in cobalt blue with a black frame and black brake calipers, the basic version has ASC (active stability control), two riding modes; Rain and Road and

So, what's it like to ride?

I feel like I need to write this part with the aim of trying to convert those that haven't tried a Boxer motor before, or have tried one round the block and written them off

"Clearly and cleverly inspired by the current Café Racer trend, Concept Roadster certainly grabbed my attention"

as having wonky ditch pumps that lurch all over the place. First gear goes in with a sideways clunk, they always have and probably always will. First to second gear can sometimes feel like you're forcing two pieces of metal into a shape they don't want to assume as well. But (and that's the mother of all buts), stick with it, get up and down the gears a few times and force yourself to stop comparing your silken inline four cylinder motor. Like a fairy and a footballer, they do exactly the same thing, but in a completely different way. Actually the most important thing you need to do when you first get on the bike is make sure you've asked for the right seat for the job. There are four to choose from and each one feels very different to the other. I opted to start the day on the standard seat height, when I swapped bikes mid morning to one that had a higher seat, the bike felt very different. I swore I'd never write the following line without my tongue jammed firmly in my cheek, but on the standard seat you really do sit in the bike and not on it. Eugh, can't believe I said that. It's true though, so make sure you don't make the mistake of walking out the shop with the wrong size seat fitted, it'll make all the difference. Getting settled doesn't take long, the riding modes and suspension settings take seconds to adjust and everything is clearly displayed on the clock set, which has three different styles to choose from. You'll also need to get used to the keyless ignition, which will take all of about three seconds. As long as the key is in your pocket starting the bike or opening the fuel filler cap is key free and very easy to do.

If you choose to opt for gear assist pro, you'll get the clutch less shift that works up and down the six-speed box. It might sound like the latest fad to you, but it sounds ace to me. You soon forget that you need the clutch, not once did it cause me any problems on the way into corners and to be honest, every time I could see a roundabout or a junction coming up ahead I shifted up a gear or two knowing that I'd soon be tapping my way down the box. The engine gives a tiny blip as it matches motor and road speeds, it's a lovely thing to use. Dynamically, I'd say it improved my ride, one less thing to think about when you're rolling into blind corners has to be a good thing and like the rest of the electronic assistance that BMW offer, this one is polished to perfection.

The Boxer motor punches best between three and seven thousand revs. On paper peak power is at 7750, but I found peak torque at 6500 a far more effective tool for scrambling out of corners and overtaking dawdling Spanish van drivers. The top end and the very bottom end are where you'll find the nature of the Boxer most noticeable. If you stay in between them, you'll get clean fuelling, instant drive and smooth engine braking. Like I said, if you're new to this drivetrain, give it a chance to impress you and it will, declare it witchcraft after two minutes and you wont know what you're missing.

One of the points that the design team was keen to hit home was the lack of width between your legs, I sniggered, you should too. What they were getting at was a very valid point though and one that I was reminded of as the bike made light work of the constant corners on our test route. On the brakes or on the gas, the leverage available made changes of direction easy, timing a clutch less downshift between two corners felt really rewarding once I'd nailed it. I did have a couple of girly slides on the way into some of the tighter corners, as did others. We put it down to the road surface, it was just as slippery in 2007 when I rode the

same route on the Z750 launch. OE tyres will be Continental, Metzeler or Michelin Pilot Road 4, the reason for the variation is because of demand. BMW don't want to rely on just one manufacturer to supply their tyres. Until this time last year, I'd have said to ignore the Continental if possible but after running them on my S1000R long termer this year, I'd have no problem running them on this bike. You wont be able to choose which tyre your R1200R comes on, though I'm sure a friendly dealer would have no problem if you demanded your preference.

One thing I haven't mentioned yet is the brakes, which I think are class leading. Plenty of feel and stacks of performance, I found I could really depend on them to get me out of trouble on the way into nipping up corners. That lightweight turn in and the clutch less shift all helping to make a bad corner entry a good one. The stopping performance is on par with the S1000R, which was more than I ever needed on road or track. After spending so long riding an S1000R this year, I felt at home straight away on this bike. Dynamically, they're very different, but simple things like the switchgear and the functionality of those buttons meant that it didn't take long to get used to the R1200R.

Conclusion.

I think the R1200R series is great, I completely get the thinking behind having three different versions of the same bike, so that it appeals to three large but fairly individual segments of the market. If I were to choose a version, I'd go for the sports model, it'd have the noisy pipe and I'd be happy. I think it's definitely a more appealing model than the outgoing version and I'm sure this one will sell to more people because of that. I personally couldn't buy this bike though, as it'd mean having to walk past a BMW RnineT in order to give my money to the nice man. They're very different bikes that share very few parts, but at the heart of both is that sweet Boxer motor and I personally prefer it more in the retro themed machine.

BMW R1200R: £11060 as tested.

Engine

Type: Flat twin, air/liquid cooled, four stroke, DOHC
Capacity: 1170cc
Bore x stroke (mm): 101 x 73
Compression ratio: 12.5:1
Fuel system: Digital fuel injection
Transmission: 6-speed, wet multiplate clutch
Final drive: Shaft
Peak power: (C) 125hp @ 7,750rpm
Peak torque: (C) 125N.m @ 6500rpm
Rider Aids: DTC, ESA, Gear assist pro, keyless ride

Chassis

Frame: Twin section
Suspension: (F) 45mm, conventional upside down forks (R) Paralever spring preload and rebound adjustable
Brakes: (F) Twin 320mm discs, four-piston radial calipers with ABS (R) 276mm disc, twin-piston floating caliper with ABS
Tyres: (F) 120/70-17 (R) 180/55-17

Geometry

Wheelbase: 1515mm
Head angle: 62.3
Trail: 125.6mm
Seat height: 760/790/820mm
Weight: (claimed, kerb) 231kg
Fuel capacity: 20.8 litres

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JOY RIDE

The Ducati Scrambler will be like Hipster catnip. Is it as good as we hoped? John took a trip to the Land of Joy to find out.

Words: John Hogan **Pics:** Milagro

"Well whaddya got there, son?" Asks the sixty-odd-year-old American chap at the top of a freshly scratched Californian Canyon. "This is the all new Ducati Scrambler, mate what do you think?" is the polite response given. "Dewcati? I aint never heard of them, are they new? I've got me a lovely Harley-Davidson at home". This was a genuine conversation from the launch. If I thought I was going to have a tough job convincing you lot of the virtues of a bike like this, then there was no better place to warm up my act than with a man who had only ever had eyes (and ears) for his Harley. I had to look around and check that I hadn't actually ridden into Area 51, I hadn't but there was a good chance this man could still be an alien.

Palm Springs, California is 5,406 miles from my house. That was the destination that Ducati chose to launch sub brand Scrambler. I know I'm a spoiled bastard getting the job to ride it so I'll trade you the fact that it rained a lot and hope you don't hate me for getting to jet off to LA. Apparently it only rains for two days a year out there, I was there for four and each one was soggy. Maybe I was a bad boy in another life. Anyway, the bike is Ducati's interpretation of what the original model would have evolved into had the firm not stopped making it back in 1975. Originally built for the American market, back then the Scrambler came in 50, 125, 250 and 450 setups. Nowadays its engine is 803cc, air-cooled and borrowed from the Monster range.

The bike is, it would seem, only a part of the bigger picture that Ducati want you to stare at. As a sub brand, Ducati is looking to cultivate a turnkey lifestyle choice. Brand Scrambler is so much more than the sum of the metal bits in the bike. Clothing and accessory choices are at Harley-Davidson levels of mind boggling.

The pitch started months ago. Yellow shipping containers appeared with 'Land Of Joy' sprawled across the side in the A-Team font. Suddenly everyone at Ducati sprouted a beard and started wearing brown chinos and check shirts. Snippets of the bike appeared in videos of people skateboarding and dancing around bonfires. Not a single reference to performance, or traction control or Carl Fogarty or anything track related. I didn't find it weird, just very different. I'm calling it a sub brand because Ducati is calling it a sub brand. These bikes will sit alongside Panigales and Multistradas but are being pitched as separate to the rest of the line up.

Sitting in the press conference, staring at the line up of Scrambler branded clothing, the Bell helmet collaboration, the massive selection of parts (not performance) accessories and the ping pong table, it was clear that this was not your typical Ducati launch. I've had trackside presentations of a few Ducatis, the MotoGP hospitality unit sticks the kettle on and the focus is based around performance. After listening to the pitch, I'd say that although the message was different, the passion from the Ducati team was as genuine as it always has been.

If you've been a GSX-R man since the day you passed your test, you may not think that this kind of brand blanket-bombing works on you. But if you can show me a man that owns a GSX-R that doesn't own some kind of blue and white tassel (Clarion fleece, Jon Reynolds baseball cap, Frankie Chili Corona rep day sack, that kind of thing) then I'll eat my own beard. Before you start throwing stones at this apparent attempt at instant lifestyle, ask yourself what's not to like? The bike is a cool thing, part of a cool brand that has made it easy for people that can't blow smoke rings to suddenly make themselves look a little bit cooler for not a lot more money.

The press kit (made from cardboard and balsa wood) shows that there are four versions of Scrambler available. Icon, Urban Enduro, Full Throttle and Classic. Visually each one is slightly different to the other. Spoked wheels, mag wheels, high and low mudguards, different seat and bar layouts all offer a modular feel, though essentially the bike underneath is identical. Our riding day was on the Icon, which as you can see in the pictures is a pretty little thing.

You can find technical specifications at the end of this test, but in a nutshell, this is the most refreshingly basic bike that Ducati has built in as long as I can remember. Brakes are assisted Brembos, a single disc up front controlled by a radial mount four piston caliper. Suspension is adjustable in as much as it goes both up and down. Kayaba front and rear is perfectly adequate and suits the look and nature of the bike perfectly. You can adjust rear preload if you really want to, but I wouldn't expect it to transform the bike into anything other than it already is. That 803cc motor delivers an utterly unstressed 75bhp at 8,250rpm and 50 lb-ft of torque at 5,750rpm. Modified slightly from its original form and now running a single 50mm throttle body, the motor is playful, not powerful. Jump on the bike and there's a little more sag than I expected. The big squishy seat, high bars and almost balloon tyres reminded me of the sweet little Suzuki Van Van that we did terrible things to at Bruntingthorpe last year. The cable clutch and old school throttle housing all adding to the illusion of something older than it actually is. The lovely LED headlight and model specific clocks remind you that you've sat on a bike rather than stepped back in time.

The six-speed gearbox on my bike was a little tight, but we slipped into the Palm Springs traffic a treat. Ducati asked us to wear clothing that suited the bike, that meant open face helmets and armoured jeans. If

you read the mag regularly you'll know that this is the kind of garbage I wear year round on whichever bike I'm riding so I didn't feel like a knob. When I looked back at 20 journos from around the world, I saw more than a few self-conscious looking faces. The casual look suits the nature of the bike perfectly. People weren't stopping and staring, in fact not many people seemed to take notice of us at all. There was this one guy in a FedEx truck that asked for my number at a set of lights, but I think that was more beard- than bike-related.

The soft touch nature of the bike suited the start stop ride through Palm Springs really well, learner riders will be flattered by the ease that you can thread this bike around traffic. More experienced riders will absolutely annihilate traffic, easy steering with loads of lock, an upright view of the road ahead and the 186 kilo weight carried low will make for light work of busy city riding. You have to let it rev to get ahead of

the traffic and this is the first Ducati I've ever ridden where the quickest way to 60mph is via three gears, but it felt like fun and wasn't frustrating in any way.

Climbing out of town and onto a sweeping canyon road, Scrambler was willing, acceleration off corners wasn't exactly hair raising but it was never supposed to be. The whole point with the riding nature of this bike is quite a neutral one. If it had stacks of power it'd need stacks of brakes, which in turn would need more suspension than this bike has. As it is, everything is in tune with everything else and as long as you remember that you're not supposed to be setting any lap records you'll enjoy the easygoing nature of this bike. I got told off more than a few times by the Ducati grown ups for pulling wheelies, it's not a boring a bike, far from it. By the end of the day we'd ridden through fog, freezing rain, cloud and stunning blue skies. I'd like to have been on a slightly more demanding route, the corners not really posing much of a challenge at the relaxed pace we were being forced to ride at made it hard to see exactly how capable the bike was. Handily I cashed in the excuse that I needed to shoot some TV footage for Bike World and hung around on the sweet roads when everyone else was heading back to the hotel for more ping-pong and campfire songs. As soon as they were out of earshot I had another few runs up and down the amazing roads, this time carrying more speed and throwing a few more shapes. Although the speed had increased, I didn't find I was enjoying the ride much more. It was nice to see that the bike was capable, but this certainly isn't the kind of bike that gets better the faster you go. In one third gear right-hander I managed to get the Pirelli MT60 rear tyre to move around and instantly thought I was going to die. Do not buy this bike and then complain that it's crap on track. It's not that kind of bike. Capisce?

So what kind of bike is it then? Is it anything like a Monster? Not really. A Ducati Monster is a performance bike loosely dressed as a naked bike, just as capable at commuting as it is at a track day. Not once during my time on the Scrambler was I reminded of a Monster. I started seeing this bike lurking at the learner end of the market. We all know that attracting new blood to motorcycling is tough at the minute. This bike should address that, as there's no doubting it's a cool-looking thing. It has all the right riding ingredients to massively appeal to those looking for something fun to own that works. Scrambler does all that.

For a company obsessed with power and technology (next month we'll be riding the 1299 Panigale round Portimao), Ducati has done an amazing job of trying to convince everyone that it's not just staffed by horsepower-hungry mentalists. They still do that bit really well, but sometimes it feels good to put your PlayStation down and pick up that old Action Man. I'm sure I won't be able to convince you all that the idea of surrounding a great bike with a load of cool

Ducati Scrambler **Price:** £6,895 as tested

Engine

Type: V-Twin, air cooled, four stroke, Desmodromic
Capacity: 802cc
Bore x stroke (mm): 88 x 66
Compression ratio: 11:1
Fuel system: Digital fuel injection, 50mm throttle body
Transmission: 6-speed, wet multiplate APTC clutch
Final drive: Chain
Peak power: (C) 75hp @ 8250rpm
Peak torque: (C) 50 lb-ft @ 5750rpm

Chassis

Frame: Tubular steel trellis
Suspension: (F) 41mm, 150mm travel, Kayaba (R) adjustable for pre load Kayaba monoshock, 150mm travel
Brakes: (F) 330mm disc, four-piston Brembo radial caliper with ABS (R) 245mm disc, single-piston Brembo caliper with ABS
Tyres: (F) 110/80-18 (R) 180/55-17 Pirelli MT60 RS

Geometry

Wheelbase: 1,445mm
Head angle: 24°
Trail: 112mm
Seat height: 770 low 790 standard
Weight: (claimed, kerb) 186kg
Fuel capacity: 13.5 litres

T shirts and stickers makes this bike worth looking at, but if you ignore all the other stuff and just ride the bike, you'd struggle not to crack a smile on one, I'm sure. It doesn't make me feel like a hipster or a retro biker, I still don't know what Ducati meant when they said this was a 'post heritage' bike (doesn't that just mean 'now'?) it just made me feel good, like an S1000RR does when it's flashing a TC light and my knee is on the road. Or a six hundred does when you nick past a 1000 on track, or a cheeky wheelie on a Street Triple. Feeling good on a motorbike is an entirely personal thing. Some bikers can't get their head around the idea that that guy on the Harley who thinks he's the Fonz is having just as good a time as that guy on the BMW who thinks he's Charley Boorman. I'm a little less judgmental. Riding doesn't need to be about escape and adventure and all the other clichéd crap, sometimes it can just be about going up the shops to get some sweets and this bike would be very, very good at that.

I often try and cut through the mush of the launch location and picture how a bike will look and feel back in the real world. To be honest, this bike would make you feel good if all you were ever allowed to do was straight line it across a car park full of cowshit, it's no firecracker to ride, but they've got exactly the right balance of everything to make you feel like you're having a good time when you're on it. New biker or old hand, restricted licence or restricted attention span, this bike will find a way into your good books, whether you choose to buy the matching T-shirt is up to you. Much like the Harley-Davidson platform where the bike is just the beginning, Ducati is happy to sell you the sizzle as well as the sausage and fair play to them. At 99 quid a month on finance, I'm in.

WHAT'S NEW PUSSYCAT?

Words: Roland Brown **Images**: Alessio Barbanti, Paul Barshon, Matteo Cavadini and Freddy Stern.

The Triumph Tiger evolves. Can Roland Brown tame it?

You've got to love the versatility of a good dual-purpose bike, and Triumph's new Tiger 800XCx is a very good one. One minute the tall triple is galloping up the Ronda road, famed stretch of swoopy Spanish tarmac used for many streetbike launches; the next, it's spitting out gravel with its spinning rear tyre in a nearby quarry where we've come for some off-road action.

That range of ability has helped make the Tiger 800 a hit since its launch five years ago. Now the standard XR roadster and XC off-roader triples are joined by upmarket versions, the XRx and XCx, which incorporate extra features including multiple riding modes and cruise control.

The basics of the 800cc, 12-valve triple motor are unchanged, as is its maximum output of 94bhp at 9,250rpm, but there are numerous mods, mostly aimed at increasing refinement and fuel efficiency. A new ride-by-wire injection system, reshaped ports, higher-lift cams and valve springs taken from the Daytona 675 contribute to a claimed 17 per cent improvement in fuel economy.

The XCx comes with dirt-friendly WP suspension with plenty of travel, plus tubular steel engine bars and an aluminium bash-plate. That suspension means it's tall, with a standard seat that is quickly adjustable between 840 and 860mm. But it was easy to ride and manoeuvrable after we'd reached the quarry and paused to change to the 'Off-road' setting by pressing the button on the instrument panel. This adjusts throttle response, and selects the low-grip versions of the traction control and ABS, the latter disabling anti-lock on the rear wheel.

That torquey triple motor has always been well-suited to off-road use, and that's even more true of this tweaked version. It pulled from nowhere, and did a good job of finding grip on the loose and bumpy surface. The updated gearbox shifted flawlessly and the traction control worked well, allowing just a little bit of slide but giving hard acceleration out of dirt turns.

The flexible engine was also great

on the road. I could run the revs down below 3,000rpm even in top, then twist the throttle to send the Tiger surging forward with increasing urgency, until it was cruising with 90mph showing on the redesigned and comprehensive instrument panel, short of the top speed of about 130mph.

Handling also impressed. Inevitably the front end dipped slightly under braking and the rear end squatted a bit under hard acceleration, but I never found it annoying, especially after firming up both ends slightly, the front being easily adjusted via the WP units' hand-turnable knobs at the top of each leg.

The standard screen is non-adjustable, but gave a reasonably quiet and turbulence-free ride. The two-part seat was also comfortable enough that I ended the day with no twinges. With a second 12V socket for heated gear, plus options for hard or soft luggage, the Triumph has potential to be loaded up for serious touring.

That's also true of the Tiger 800XRx, which has a 30mm lower seat and firmer suspension, giving more of a conventional road bike feel. The XRx lacks the XCx's fork-top damping adjusters but gains screen adjustability after loosening a knob on each side.

Much of the time there's not much difference between the two models. All the new Tigers have bars set slightly higher and further away, with potential for further fine-tuning. The shorter seat-to-footrest distance means the XRx isn't quite as roomy, but I didn't feel cramped despite having lanky legs. I did benefit from the adjustable screen, which doesn't require tools but does need both hands.

Engine-wise the two triples are identical, and I'm not sure how much the XRx gains from its multiple modes. The long-stroke Tiger engine is so flexible and well fuelled that I never felt the need for a softer throttle response, and the difference between Road and Sport modes was barely detectable.

What was clear was difference between the two chassis, with the XRx feeling notably firmer both on straights and when cornering. Some riders would doubtless prefer its tauter feel and the slightly sharper, more immediate steering from its smaller, 19-inch front wheel, though the XCx handles so well that the difference isn't vast. The XRx's Pirelli Scorpions doubtless give a touch more roadgoing grip than the XCx's more dirt friendly but narrower Bridgestone Battlewings, too, but I didn't have any problems with either of them.

For longer trips the XRx gains by coming with the comfort seat that is an accessory for the other three Tigers. Despite that I found the XCx more comfortable, due to its more compliant suspension. At least the XRx seat is similarly broad for both rider and pillion, and also shares the benefits of the solid pillion grab-handles, plus the x-models' additional power socket.

With other x-bike features including cruise control, self-cancelling indicators, hand-guards and a centre-stand also included, the XRx is a respectably well equipped tourer. Its price of £9,499 looks competitive, too although personally I'd cough up an extra £500 for the XCx and its extra off-road ability. Either way, these Tigers are good bikes made better still.

TRIUMPH TIGER 800XCx [XRx], 2015

Engine

Type Transverse triple, water cooled, four stroke, DOHC
Capacity 799cc
Bore x stroke (mm) 74 x 61.9mm
Compression ratio 11.1:1
Fuel system Digital fuel injection
Transmission six-speed, wet multiplate clutch
Final drive Chain
Peak power (C) 94hp @ 9,250rpm
Peak torque (C) 79N.m @ 7,850rpm

Chassis

Frame Tubular steel trellis
Suspension (F) 43mm WP, 220mm travel, adjustable for compression and rebound damping [43mm Showa, 180mm travel, no adjustment] (R) WP monoshock, 215mm wheel travel, adjustable for preload and rebound damping [Showa monoshock, 170mm travel, adjustable for preload]
Brakes (F) Twin 308mm discs, twin-piston Nissin calipers with ABS (R) 255mm disc, single-piston Nissin caliper with ABS
Tyres (F) 90/90-21 (R) 150/70-17 Bridgestone Battlewing [(F) 110/90-19 (R) 150/70-17 Pirelli Scorpion]

Geometry

Wheelbase 1,568mm [1,555mm]
Head angle 23.1° [23.7°]
Trail 91.1mm [86.2mm]
Seat height 840/860mm [810/830mm]
Weight (claimed, wet) 221kg [216kg]
Fuel capacity 19 litres

Performance

Peak power (Claimed): 115hp @ 10,000rpm
Peak torque (Claimed): 87.5Nm @ 8,500rpm

Rider Aids

Four riding modes, switchable traction control

RETRO RIDES

SUZUKI GSX-R1000 K5

Is it really ten years since we first rode the now-legendary GSX-R1000 K5? Sadly, the calendar's not fibbing. Al takes a tearful trip to The Good Old Days...

Words: Alan Dowds **Pics:** Paul Barshon

There's a select, exalted list of bikes which changed the sports bike landscape utterly when they first appeared. Kawasaki's GPZ900R, Suzuki's GSX-R750, Honda's FireBlade, Yamaha's R1 – the original versions of all those bikes turned engine and chassis performance up another notch. And while it's fair to say that Suzuki's first GSX-R1000 K1 was a corking bike, it wasn't quite a game changer.

That took another few years. To early 2005 in fact, when Suzuki loaded up the early-noughties-launch-bandwagon of business-class flights and Australian racetrack, to launch the GSX-R1000 K5. Now, flying to Sydney emperor class to wazz round Eastern Creek is a pretty sweet deal, of course. There was a hint of pressure about the test though; back then the litre-class bunfight was reaching fever-pitch amongst the Japanese firms. The R1, ZX-10R and CBR1000RR were all in the ring, and I'd be calling the K5 on an isolated ride before we got to the group tests. If I got it wrong, the ribbings in the office would be merciless.

It took about five laps to come to the conclusion that we had a winner. Any doubts I had about the trippy trapezoidal endcan disappeared in an instant, as I tried to follow Aussie superbike racer (and top bloke) Shaun Giles round more than one bend of Eastern Creek. The motor was super-strong, with the midrange of a 'Busa and the top-end squeeeaaaal of an old GSX-R750 SRAD. Suzuki had inexplicably stuck to a 988cc capacity for the first two models, and while 11cc doesn't seem like a big boost, we were getting the full 999cc for the first time. We also got dual-valve, dual-injector throttle bodies; another first. The result was 175 claimed ponies, in a package so drivable and grunty that I would have choked on my Victoria Bitter at any notion of needing 'power modes' or 'traction control'.

The chassis was just as sweet, with brakes, suspension and handling to top the class, and display even my moderate track skills at their best round Eastern Creek . But it was the weight that sealed the deal with the K5 – at a claimed 166kg dry, it was the lightest GSX-R1000 ever. Even allowing for the great manufacturers' swindle when they all suddenly switched to 'kerb weights, the K5/6 was the peak of lightweight litre bikes.

For all its design class though, the K5/6 was lucky. It was the last model released before the Euro 3 emissions rules came into play in 2006, so it could do without the extra kilos of catalysts and other gear needed to cut noxious emissions basically in half. And sadly, that seemed to tip the balance. Adding more revs to make more power to cancel the weight loss, meant a peakier power delivery, losing the sweet combination of minimal girth and maximal grunt which the K5 got spot-on.

SUPER POWER

YES, IT'S THE LATEST SALVO IN THE LITRE BIKE WARS – THIS TIME FROM SUZUKI. BIG AL WENT TO AUSTRALIA TO BE SHOCKED AND AWED BY THE 2005 GSX-R1000

Pics: Paul Barshon

pproaching B-52 Arclight trike. Because let's face it, e old GSX-R1000 was a real ece of high-horsepower n-inducing. OK, the overall ss of Yamaha's R1 and mayhem of Kawasaki's 10R trumped the GSX-R ur tests last year. But the ght of that thermonuclear ki powerplant, tweaked, aded and fitted in a smaller, lighter chassis was a sobering prospect, even while my jet-lag addled brain struggled to cope with all the blonde goddesses power-walking round downtown Sydney.

As we pulled up at Eastern Creek track a day or so later, I'd got over the lack of sleep, but I still had a hint of trepidation, even as the technical presentation emphasised the new bike's enhanced handling and control characteristics. Still, the throttle goes both ways I thought, as we pulled out of pitlane for a couple of sighting laps.

My first impressions of the track were pretty unsettling. Every corner – and there seems to be ➔

"What bike did BMW ride while developing its S1000RR? A GSX-R1000 K5"

The gentle drift sideways continued for the big GSX-R, which wasn't such a big deal, as the credit crunch crapped all over the hopes of motorcycling. And there lack of game-changers from Japan too: the big-bang R1 went off with a bit of a whimper in the end, Honda spent the rest of the decade counting the profits from Jazz sales, and Kawasaki's ZX-10R became more and more insane as the years went by.

It was BMW who came up with the next bike to grace that list of all-time greats. Its S1000RR might have been dripping in tech, but like the K5, its main attractions were super-grunty power delivery, light weight, and easy handling. It even looked quite like a K5 from certain angles – a worthy nod to the best GSX-R we've seen.

And what bike did the BMW engineers have in the garages at the S1000RR development sessions? Yep, it was a GSX-R1000 K5 that the moto-papparazzi grabbed on their 600mm lenses. A fitting tribute we think...

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RUNNING ON MT

The Yamaha MT-09 is a cracking street bike with a great motor, so Yamaha slung on some bodywork, gave it a comfy seat and called it a sports tourer. It bloody worked too.

Does liking the sensible, touring version of a bike make me boring? Normally yes; but in the case of the MT-09 Tracer, the alleged sensible version still wheelies in fourth gear. That definitely ain't boring in my book. Powersliding it up and down slick mountain roads in southern Spain with the ABS fuse ditched and the traction control off I figured it just might be the ultimate sports tourer. So stick your pipe, slippers and VFR owners club patch up your bum; there's a new all-day shredder that puts the mischief back into touring.

New old flame

We're pretty big MT-09 fans here at SuperBike – it was an absolute hoot to ride on the original launch and our long termer gave us so many laughs that we bought it. It might lack the chassis refinement of the Triumph Street Triple, or the finish and detail of the Ducati 848 Streetfighter but crucially, when you call in the old value-for-money card, the MT kicks ass. But being well priced isn't sexy and wouldn't normally get us vaguely excited – that's where the 850cc triple-cylinder engine hits the final homer. It sounds great, it has lively power that fires you forward regardless of rpm and it can flick between wild screamer and slick cruiser in a couple of gear shifts. Despite an aggressive streak, it's a bike you can happily find yourself riding all day. But as a versatile all-rounder, there are a couple of points that jam a stick in the spokes of fun on a long ride. The seat's good for an hour or so, but stay planted there for a few hours and the ol' numb bum starts to get a bit weary. Ditto the absence of any wind protection – it's never an issue chasing rabbits around the back lanes, but on a longer, high speed run you get pretty tired of having your nose squished against the inside of your visor. Head off on a bit of a road trip and you find a need for another 30 miles between fuel stops and somewhere to stick some spare pants other than on the pillion seat. No problem there, it's not designed as a touring bike, but the MT-09 Tracer is. The real question is whether the Tracer can retain enough of the standard bike's lunacy.

The MT-09 was always destined to serve as a platform for several different models – the cost of developing an all-new engine has to be spread out to be justifiable. So from day one there was always a pannier and fairing-ed up version in the wings. This means that the Tracer doesn't feel like a re-engineered lash up of a current bike, it feels like a new model in its own right. And by engineering in contingency for fairings and panniers filled with cheap beer from the start, the suspension and chassis geometry doesn't have to be completely reworked to remain stable. We might not be your typical touring bike people, but we know what it takes

SHARK
TRACER

"Even with burnouts and wheelies, I managed a 150 miles from a tank"

to make or break a good long-distance bike. It's the little details that can annoy you on a sports tourer; an absent centre stand makes chain lubing and adjustment a pain, for instance. Luckily the Tracer has one of those and it has pillion grab rails too, keeping passengers subdued while you wheelie away from every French tollbooth. The fuel tank has gained an extra four litres of capacity, stretching the fuel range to 180 miles. Even with a careful blend of rolling burnouts, wheelies and drifting I still managed 150 miles from a single fill. The seat is larger, adjustable for height and a good deal more comfortable too – there wasn't a rear end complaint all day (none caused by the seat anyway...), though the real test will be a 100-mile motorway sit in. Revised suspension with more preload and increased damping, along with the thicker seat contributes to a 30mm increase in seat height over the standard MT, although a lowering linkage is available to drop the Tracer's seat further. With the standard Tracer seat in the low position, its height never bothered me at my 5'8" altitude. Higher and wider bars are adjustable and give the bike a more substantial feel than its minimalist predecessor. The adjustable screen did a good job of keeping the wind off me, particularly in the higher setting. More lofty riders were happy enough in the high setting too. If I could spot a little niggle at this point, it would be the fiddly adjustment on the screen – you have to reach in front of the forks to reach two separate handscrews. A minor point, but it does mean that realistically you've got to stop to adjust the screen.

We're still going with the sport-touring friendly upgrades here – it's pretty clear that the Tracer is more than just a bolt on fairing and a centre stand. The electronics have had a going through too, starting with smoother throttle response across all three D-mode settings. The MT-09 can be a bit aggressive for some, and the sharp throttle response in 'A' mode is, frankly, jerky and annoying from closed to part throttle, while in 'Std' or 'B' modes it's merely noticeable. But with the softer strategy adopted on the Tracer, the initial snatch that was the source of some complaint on the original bike is now only really noticeable in 'A' mode, the most aggressive mode. And being able to use all three settings means you have the option to switch between the hangover-friendly 'B' mode, normal riding in 'Std' mode and mad wheelies and slides from the punchy response of 'A' mode. Speaking of wheelies and skids, there's a new switchable traction control system that has the ignition timing, fuelling and throttle valve at its disposal for highside prevention. With it switched on, wheelies were held down; even at full throttle in first gear the front would only rise a few inches before the electronics pushed it back down. And through fast, sweeping turns, the TC would allow a small amount of slide, but any aggressive throttle movements were dismissed with an electronic tut and a roll of the digital eyes. Unlike some other more basic traction control systems, the Tracer's would cut and trim back power smoothly, without upsetting the bike's composure. The ABS was equally smooth under normal riding conditions, but ridden aggressively you could get the Tracer's brakes confused, particularly on bumpy corner entries with a lot of back brake. But we're talking about pretty committed riding here – it's absolutely fine under normal conditions. If you really must engage in skids and wheelies, the TC is easy to turn off (although you do have to be stationary, or at least in neutral) and the ABS fuse is just below the rider's seat. Yamaha has still stuck to its non-switchable ABS guns and hasn't allowed traction control switching on-the-fly. I quizzed a couple of the engineers about it and their response was that they didn't want people to accidentally disengage either system and then have a crash as a result. Fair enough, although in my view that's either a little paranoid or a little patronizing. Still on the electronics upgrades, there's a new, larger dash with a ton of useful information, including fuel gauge, fuel range and external temperature. It ain't exactly the slickest looking dash ever fitted to a bike – think more original Game Boy than iPhone 6 – but it is controllable from the handlebars. And just as I was thinking of more funnies

about the dot matrix display, I remembered the price – at £8,284 OTR the Tracer is a bargain and the retro-but-functional display entirely forgivable. And finally there's a 12V cigarette lighter adaptor as standard for plugging your heated jacket/ satnav/travel kettle into.

Run through the hills

So, lots of new bits and apparently no obvious ommisions from the sports touring must-haves list. There was some mumbling about no heated grips as standard, especially when the onboard display read '2 degrees Celsius', but they are on the accessories list and I defer to my previous statement about the price. If the Tracer cost the same as a BMW R1200GS, you could slate it for having a lower spec, but it doesn't, so all is forgiven. Again. Ditto the accessory panniers – they hang off integrated mounts and are of the same semi-hard type as the ones on Ducati's Hyperstrada. They're useful for sticking a few sets of pants and some waterproofs in, but not big enough to swallow a helmet; fnarr fnarr. Among much grizzling about the cold (mostly from my direction) we headed out of town and into the hills. The TC had saved my bacon from the bacon within five yards of the hotel gate, as it held down an attempted wheelie long enough for me to spot the Guarda Civila. Phew. In 30 minutes I'd established that the screen is pretty good at keeping the wind off my chest, riding everywhere in 1st gear generates more engine heat to help keep warm and the standard hand guards don't. We stopped for a finger thawing session, before continuing a chilly trip through stunning roads and scenery. It's this sort of riding that really highlights any flaws in a bike – when you're cold and there's bugger all grip, it's amazing how quickly things can piss you off. But even when I couldn't feel my fingers enough to indicate, the Tracer continued to impress. The motor is happy to dawdle along at low revs, picking up when asked for an overtake without hesitation. The sports touring Dunlops (a Yamaha-spec version of the Roadsmart tyre) offered good feedback and stable steering. Obviously, when it was really cold, the feedback offered was 'I'm cold, there's no grip; go back to bed'.

"The big, wide bars give even more leverage to stick the Tracer where you want it to go"

After a few hours' riding in the morning, the MT had proven itself as a flexible, easy bike to ride, with stable handling and decent wind protection. Yawn. If that's all there is to riding a bike, kill me now. But thankfully for humanity, as the temperatures crept up, the Tracer came out of its shell, middle finger (well, front wheel) in the air and head banging to AC/ DC with a beer in its hand. Let the 850cc triple howl to the redline, feed it gears and then hammer the brakes into the turns. The big, wide bars give even more leverage to stick the Tracer where you want it to go and the new suspension configuration sorts everything else out. The suspension is one area that really surprised me – it's actually more composed and happier being pushed hard than the standard MT-09. Gone is the wallow, vanquished is the pitch on deceleration and, er, disappeared be the endlessly dragging footrests. The Tracer is actually supposed to have less ground clearance, but stiffer damping keeps it from moving around so much and the increase in preload means it sits higher on its springs. This just serves to encourage more and more fun, forgetting about the cold and happily flicking into endless turns. There comes a point, though, when the fun must stop. It must stop so you can turn traction control off and add wheelies to the heady concoction of far-away stupidity.

First, second, third and four gears are spent with the headlights confusing air traffic, as you try to look around the side of the new fairing. From flicking up a big long stand-up mono along open, empty straights, to popping a cheeky bar tweak as you lift the front over a crest between corners, the Tracer still loves a wheelie. For the seriously committed, or perhaps those who should be committed, the next step is to remove the rider seat, drop kick the ABS fuse into the nearest hedge and engage what we like to call 'Skid Mode'. It is a bit annoying having to do this just to enable skids and stoppies, but we figure the number of people who actually will is pretty low. Which is a shame, because there is quite possibly no better feeling than skidding a bike into a slippery hairpin, before lighting up the rear tyre on the gas to slide round and out. Such shenanigans are fraught with highside dangers, of course, but more addictive than heroin-flavour cigarettes.

Conclusion

The final section of our day's riding takes us along a 10km stretch of tight, twisty mountain road, with a surface friction similar to that of a polished wooden floor. You remember the first time as a kid (big or small) when you discovered skidding around on this, wearing holes in your socks? Remember how much fun that was? Well multiply that by three cylinders and two wheels and you've some idea of just how good this road was. The lack of grip for the front wheel is irrelevant when the bike is sideways, leaving a faint line on the Spanish tarmac-pattern linoleum. And when the tyre finally hooks up, you get another wheelie – I literally soiled myself with excitement. The fact that all I can talk about is wheelies and drifting around hairpins should give you some indication of just how well this bike has retained its original mad character. I'm gonna go on record as saying that, if anything, it's better that the standard MT-09 and I really liked that bike. The Tracer has added a load of day-to-day usefulness onto an already good bike, without losing the fun and with an improvement in handling. Anything that loves wheelies, drifts and skids as much as it loves riding to the Alps is set to be a winner for us. Get down for a test ride on one in March and tell me I'm wrong. I dare you.

Yamaha MT-09 Tracer £8,284otr

Engine

Type: 847cc, liquid cooled, inline triple, DOHC
Bore x Stroke (mm): 78.0 x 59.1
Compression Ratio: 11.5 : 1
Fuel system: Fuel injection with ride by wire
Transmission: 6 speed, wet clutch, cable actuation
Final Drive: Chain

Chassis

Frame: Cast aluminium diamond, external swingarm pivot
Front Suspension: Inverted 41mm fork, adjustable preload, 137mm travel
Rear Suspension: Linkage-type monoshock, adjustable preload, 130mm travel
Brakes: (F) Twin 298mm discs, radial four-piston calipers (R) Single 240mm disc, single-piston floating caliper.
Tyres: Dunlop D222 Sportmax (F) 120/70-17 (R) 180/55-17

Geometry

Wheelbase (A) : 1,440mm
Head angle (B) : 24 degrees
Trail (E) : 100mm
Seat height (C) : 845 - 860mm
Weight (claimed, full fuel load, ready to ride) ///caption/// : 210kg
Fuel capacity (D) : 18 litres

Performance

Peak power (Claimed): 115hp @ 10,000rpm
Peak torque (Claimed): 87.5Nm @ 8,500rpm

Rider Aids

ABS, switchable traction control, adjustable seat,

Typical Finance Cost

Deposit: £2,027
Duration: 37 Months
Monthly: £129
Final Payment: £2,883
APR: 9.7%

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AFFORDABLE LUXURY

Words: Alan Dowds **Pics:** MV Agusta

MV Agusta's built its reputation on high-spec supersports machines. But its new Stradale 800 is aimed at a more relaxed market. Can premium and practical mix? Al went to Spain to find out

Things can go weird when luxury brands go for mass markets. Sometimes it's a disaster: when Burberry caps became more prevalent on police lineups than fashion lineups, the firm had to take drastic action to keep the value of its vomit-beige tartan tat closer to £500 per item than £5.

Sometimes it works a bit better: German firm Leica normally produces incredibly posh rangefinder cameras – lenses cost up to £7k on their own, and it even sells a black and white-only digital camera for £6k. Without a lens. Or flash. Or anything except a nice wee strap in fact. But Leica also sells cheaper compact cameras, rebranded Panasonics or the like, with the red dot logo, and a correspondingly higher cost. People get the cachet of the premium brand (with the nice wee strap), in a cheaper deal, and (whisper it) they're often much easier for mortals to get the most from.

So what are we to make of MV Agusta's new Stradale 800? In some ways, Agusta is like Leica: selling no-compromise, top-spec, luxury items, with superb performance, high prices, and a little less user-friendliness than more-prosaic brands. Bikes like the Dragster 800 RR, with its exotic £3.5k spoked Kineo wheels and single-sided swingarm. Or the full-beans F4 superbike range, dripping in Ohlins, Brembo, carbon and track porn. Incredible machines, but hardly the stuff of day-to-day commuting or light touring duties, the avowed target for the new Stradale 800.

SUSPENSION

It's an MV, so of course front and rear are fully adjustable. The Marzocchi forks have separate damping legs – one compression, one rebound. Rear shock is by Sachs.

FRAME

The Stradale's steel tube/alloy plate frame is trademark MV, and based on the Rivale. It's slightly longer and has a degree more head angle. That plus a 30mm longer swingarm gives 46mm more wheelbase than the nutter Rivale.

ELECTRONICS

MV's given the Stradale both barrels from the rider aids 12-bore, with switchable ABS, four power modes and eight levels of traction control. You also get a quickshifter, and best of all, a blipping downshifter. Close the throttle, press the gear lever down, and with no further input, you'll smoothly enter the next lowest gear with a rort of panache.

ENGINE

The 800cc version of Agusta's modern triple has been around for a few years now. Its schtick is that it spins 'backwards', that is, the opposite way to the wheels. That's so that the gyroscopic forces from the big spinning masses cancel each other out to some degree, making direction changes easier. Sound a bit witchcraft-y? Rossi's Yamaha M1 GP bike used the same setup when it was developed. The Stradale has a unique hydraulic clutch, that makes the motor 30mm narrower than before.

BRAKES

Where lesser brands cut corners, MV retains the glamour. So you get 320mm discs, and four-piston Brembo radial calipers up front. A notch down from the monobloc items on the supersport bikes, but still corking calipers. Bosch ABS has a rear wheel lift mitigation system, to stop panic-braking commuters flipping themselves forward like eight-year-olds on their first BMX.

KIT

The panniers (a first on an MV from the factory we think?) are small, but perfectly-formed. Lockable zippers and simple attachment system are useful, built-in rear lights are cool. There's a small electrical connector you need to unplug and stow when you remove each bag – a minor faff. When the bags are off, the tail lights under the seat are revealed.

At first glance, the Stradale looks a bit like a Ducati Hyperstrada. Like the skinny Duke, the Stradale is based on a supermotard, Agusta's Rivale, with a set of posh wee panniers and tweaks to add usability. The tall, upright riding position, minimalist fairing and long-travel suspension are all firmly on the road side of the adventure touring recipe – and it also looks pretty sweet, glinting in the Spanish sun.

Yes, Spain. At the tail end of the year, the good people from MV have flown us to Andalusia, for a wazz round the dry, (relatively) warm asphalt between Casares and Ronda. It's a welcome break from the grey drizzle of London, and I can't wait to get out for the ride. I'm assigned a bike, given a quick briefing on how to tweak the various rider aids, and I hop on. The starter starts, and we're away.

Things are going well straight off. The seat is a bit tall for my stumpy pins, but I've got used to that over the years. The dash is clean and clear, and I've just about retained enough knowledge of the controls to keep the ABS on, stick it in Sport mode, turn the TC down a notch and start the lap timer. Perfect.
We've got a guide for the day, one of MV's test riders, and he's already warned us of the chilly Tarmac first thing in the morning, so I'm grateful for the traction control and ABS, and the steady pace out the hotel and along the coast for a few warmup miles. The Stradale isn't a big bike at all, the dashboard is close up to your face, and the neat little adjustable screen isn't far from my helmet chinbar. Wind protection is good though, and with my Knox race gloves on, I'm very pleased with the natty handguards on the ends of the fairly wide bars. What's not so good is the seat: there's a distinct 'bum' shape fitted into it, and where you'd like to move about and maybe slide back a bit, you can't.

We're up in the hills now, and MV's man is clearly feeling the effects of his breakfast cappuccino. We're 'pressing on' at a fair old rate, up into the hills toward Ronda. The main Ronda road is mythical amongst car and bike testers for its continuous twisting, sinuous bends, but we're on a smaller road up the mountain, and it's a corker. I've not been 'on it' on a bike abroad for a few years, but it all came flooding back. Sheer cliff face on the inside, sheer cliff drop on the outside, tenuous fencing, locals driving like bipolar go-kart racers, all check. What was an additional bonus was the terrible surface of the road. Public finances being what they are in Spain, I guess the maintenance of mountain roads for road test johnnies isn't a high priority, and there were potholes and rough patches a-plenty. Worse, though, were the deep dips and cambers, as if the road foundations were coming adrift.

But the Stradale was coping like a star. The riding position was perfect for the super-tight hairpin bends, the long-travel suspension was soaking up punishment like a heavyweight champ, and the flat torque drive from the engine fired you out of every corner. The up and down shifter was a revelation too, once you got your head around it. One of the engineers had described it as making things as easy as on a scooter, and that made perfect sense. Clutchless changes means one less thing to think about as you hurtle down a 90mph mountain sweeper trying to keep up with Franco the crazy MV test rider...

But it was the chassis that really impressed. That suspension makes an incredible job of soaking up even the wildest amounts of wheel travel, while keeping you stable, planted, and able to crack the gas on regardless. The wide bars give ample leverage for steering input, and it's easy to throw the Stradale from full lean to upright to opposite lean in a trice. There's tremendous amounts of ground clearance too: a tentative toe stuck out will eventually touch Tarmac, but I never had a peg or lever deck out anywhere. No complaints about the brakes either: the front Brembos have a progressive feel, with plenty of power and no lack of control – the rear needed a little more care though – it was possible to kick the ABS in if you gave it a thoughtless boot.

The Pirelli Diablos had lots of warmth in them when we stopped for pics, and performed admirably on the poor sections of the mountain asphalt – they'll be superb on normal UK tarmac I'd say.

After lunch, we head back to the hotel on the bigger, faster, more sweeping main road. I've been down here a few times, but not in a while, so I was trying to be cautious as my addled brain tried to recover memories of the route. But the Stradale just eggs you on and on. There's a fine intake roar from below you, and the exhaust note is as good as you'll get on an EC pipe. The suspension was as excellent on faster smoother roads as it had been on the earlier bumpy route, and the little MV was super-stable everywhere. I still hadn't fallen in love with the seat though: the movement restriction was bothersome, and even the couple of hundred klicks we'd ridden so far had given me a bit of arse-ache.

The 115bhp motor was probably just about right for the faster route – you never feel like you're running out of puff. On one long straight, I tucked in and managed to see an indicated 210kph, with more to come, which ties in with MV's claimed 133mph top speed. Sure, it'd be nice to have a bit more top-end for 'Autobahn touring', but that's not quite the Stradale's remit. As the man from Agusta told us, it's a bike aimed at light touring, and commuting. Perfect to waft you from your Chelsea riverside penthouse flat across town to Canary Wharf, or perhaps a jaunt down to Hove for lunch of a weekend.

Back at the hotel, safe and sound (despite our best efforts), I'm feeling a lot of love for the Stradale. It's a bit like a very well executed version of something like a Kawasaki Versys: easy to use, super-practical, but with none of the cheap bits, and a hefty chunk of extra power. Sure, it's a pricey option at nearly £12k. But just as with a nice Leica camera, there's a lot of rewards that come with that pricetag... SF

MV Agusta £11,899 otr

Engine

Type: l/c inline-triple, 12v DOHC, 798cc
Bore x stroke: 79x54.3mm
Compression ratio:13.3:1
Fuel system: MVICS fuel injection, ride by wire throttle bodies
six-speed/chain

Chassis

steel tube trellis, aluminium swingarm plates
43mm USD Marzocchi fork, fully adjustable, separate adjustment legs
Sachs monoshock, fully adjustable
dual 320mm discs, four-piston radial mount Brembo calipers (F), 220mm disc, twin-piston caliper (R)
Pirelli Diablo Rosso II or Scorpion Trail 120/70 17 F, 180/55 17 R
Wheelbase 1,460mm
Trail: 109mm
Fuel capacity 16 litres
Dry weight 181kg

Performance

Peak power (claimed):115bhp@11,000rpm
Peak torque (claimed):78.5Nm@9,000rpm

Rider Aids

Quickshifter, downshift throttle blipper, eight-stage traction control, four torque maps, switchable ABS with rear wheel lift prevention.

Finance deal

MV accepts gold bars, platinum dust, krugerrands, Swiss francs, and it also has a very nice PCP deal available at the moment.

GARAGE LAND

Hunkered down in your lockup for the winter? You want to get it set up right though, so here's our pick of the kit to make winter rebuilds, services and maintenance a breeze...

GEAR GREMLIN OIL DRAIN PAN

Draining oil or coolant is a simple enough job, but there's plenty of potential for mishap. A too-small, too-shallow, or too-narrow container can slosh effluent all round your nice MTV Cribs-style lockup, possibly even staining your steel-toecapped working brogues. Avoid such misery with this cheap-yet-cheerful drain pan from Gear Gremlin. Wide, deep, and with sloping sides for easy emptying.

www.thekeycollection.co.uk
£9.99

KTM FRONT PADDOCK STAND

The Austrian nonsense-peddlars do an excellent line in accessories, including this front paddock stand. Unlike ones which sit in the fork bottoms, this one lets you remove forks (but not yokes). Made from proper tubular steel, not chocolate.

www.ktm.co.uk
£103

GEAR GREMLIN MAGNETIC BOLT TRAY

End lost fastener misery with this neat little magnetic bolt tray from Gear Gremlin. Bright green plastic will help you keep track of it in the grimmest lockup, and it'll keep all your (steel/ferrous) fasteners in one place. Very useful.

www.thekeycollection.co.uk/
£7.49

SEALEY TOOL CHEST

This Sealey 'American Pro' topchest and roller cabinet set has 14 drawers with ball-bearing runners – plus a 239pc tool kit. The tools are pretty comprehensive, with a decent-looking socket set, wrenches, pliers, screwdrivers and loads more. It's not going to be Beta or Snap-On quality, but will definitely get you started if you're looking to build up a tool set. The cabinet and chest are the best bits: this is the sort of stuff that lasts you for decades, properly looked after.

www.wemoto.com

£359.94

OPTIMATE 3

The latest version of the ever-popular battery maintainer, the Optimate 3 Global is half the size and weight of the previous model, but a third more powerful, and can save even more neglected batteries from an untimely death! Stick your bike's lead-acid battery on this chappie, and it'll be ready for action as soon as your winter rebuild is over.

www.optimate1.com

£49.99

OXFORD BIKE DOCK

You'll have seen this kind of thing in better bike transport vans, and at the front of dynos. It's a bump-lock stand, which holds the front of your bike upright and secure. It fits most bikes, can be bolted down to the deck, and has loops for fitting security items - chains, U-locks. Great for organising your bike collection without wasting space.

www.oxprod.com

£99.99

RS BESPOKE WORKSHOP FURNITURE

RS Workshop Equipment is an independent firm based near Peterborough, that produces built-to-order modular workshop installations. Think Möben kitchens, but with built-in air lines, fluids management, lift controls, roller cabinets and bespoke tool drawers. From a single bench at £595 to a multi-drawer unit at £835, you'll have the dream workshop layout, designed to your spec. For serious lockup layabouts only...

www.rsworkshopequipment.co.uk/

From £595 per unit, unlimited customising options.

R&G REAR PADDOCK STAND

Smart rear stand from British firm R&G Racing, has neat black powder-coated finish, double wheels and uses hook fittings to suit swingarm bobbins. There's also a matching front stand available.

www.rg-racing.com

£75

KTM CLEANING WIPES

Like a first-time mum with a new baby, you'll be spending plenty of time mopping up after your build. Lose the bag of old pants and T-shirts and replace with a big old tub of pre-dampened Turbo Wipes. Pricey, but you'll look like a proper player.

www.ktm.co.uk

£17

PIT MAT

Nothing says 'lame' like a scrap of mouldy old Axminster in the middle of your garage. For less than £50, you'll smile every time you open the lockup door, and see this sweet rubber Pit Mat. It's a safety issue too: wipe-clean, non-slip, allergen-free. This one is from KTM, but they exist for other brands too.

www.ktm.co.uk

£44.54

SEAT BUDDY

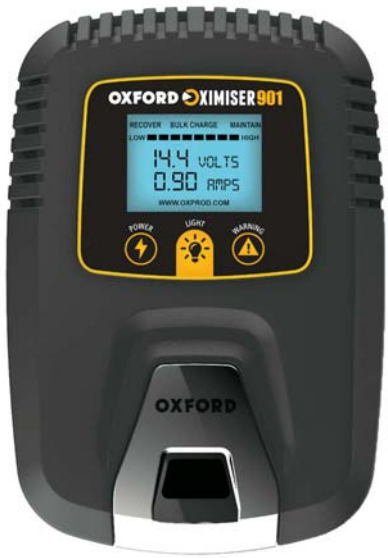
Let the Seat Buddy take the strain of bike jobs: the tough plastic stool has four castors on the bottom, letting you scoot about between bike and toolchest without having to get up and down. Loads of handy pockets for tools, bits, etc. and not a wallet-buster.

www.thekeycollection.co.uk
£24.99

OXFORD OXIMISER 901

Oxford's venerable Oximiser charger has been around for a good few years now, and this is its latest iteration for 2015. There's a new professional-looking black and yellow finish, and it's suitable for all lead-acid batteries, up to 30AH, so will do a job on small-medium car batteries too. Clever five-stage charging electronics, easily wall mounted, bosh.

www.oxprod.com
£49.99



OXFORD DORMEX INDOOR COVER

Just because your pride and joy is indoor for winter, doesn't mean it can't do with a bit more protection. Keep dust, grime, and random scuffs or scrapes at bay with a indoor cover like this one from Oxford Products. It's got a breathable membrane to stop condensation, and will also prevent UV paint damage from the sun (!).

www.oxprod.com
Medium £19.99, large £24.99

SEALEY SINGLE POST MOTORCYCLE LIFT

Enough of this stone-age lifestyle, heaving bikes up onto stands with nothing more than brute strength and force of will. This Sealey lift will hoist 450kg with ease, pumped up with a neat hydraulic hand lever. A sound alternative to a normal table-type bike lift, which takes up a lot less space, and is more portable. Decent price too.

www.wemoto.co.uk
£263.94

CABLE OILER

An often-missed job, a quick skoosh of WD40 down a clutch, brake or throttle cable will keep things moving freely. Do a proper job of it with this little tool: it clamps on the cable end, you stick the aerosol tube into the little hole, and it directs lube to the right place with no mess.

www.thekeycollection.co.uk
£6.49

TYRE GAUGE

It'd be a shame to spend all winter on your 300bhp R1 café racer bobber sidecar project, only to crash it on your first run in spring because the tyres were too soft. End this possibility now by investing in a proper, winner-spec tyre pressure gauge, like this KTM-branded fellow.

www.ktm.com
£21.37

KTM 1/4 AND 3/8 INCH SOCKET SETS

A pair of high-quality socket sets in KTM's trademark tangerine hue – the quarter-inch set comes with a good selection of driver bits, ratchet, extensions, spinner, and the 3/8 chappie rounds off the larger fastener sizes. Nice stuff.

www.ktm.co.uk
1/4" set: £54.61, 3/8" set: £128.66

KNEEPADS

Working on bikes often ends up with you on hands and knees, so protect those delicate patellar regions with these solid knee pads. Will also do the business when you're on patrol in Helmand, or planting out the winter greens for next season.

www.thekeycollection.co.uk
£19.99

WHEEL CLEANING RAMP

Tough, compact set of alloy rollers on a bearing frame, lets you turn the rear (or front) wheel for cleaning and chain maintenance. Just push the bike up and onto the ramp, plonk the wheel into the rollers, and stick it on the sidestand. You can then turn the wheels with ease, all the better for OCD cleaning and lubing action.

www.thekeycollection.co.uk

£69.99

PUMP

Compressors, air tanks and the like are all very well, but sometimes you just need to stick a few PSI into a tyre. Gear Gremlin's stirrup pump does the job, and will turn its hand to beach balls, lilos, footballs, inflatable lady companions, stag night sheep, you name it. Perfect.

www.thekeycollection.co.uk

£22.99

KTM SCREWDRIVER SET

Accessorise your KTM socket set and stands with a set of top-notch screwdrivers. Three plain sizes and two Phillips.

www.ktm.co.uk

£17.08

CHAIN BREAKER

Splitting chains is a crap job, and good tools for the task are essential (unless you're an animal with a 10-inch grinder and a bad attitude). If we're honest, we're yet to find a great one, but this breaker is supplied by KTM, so should be decent.

www.ktm.com

£41.16

OXFORD PREMIUM PADDOCK STANDS FRONT AND REAR

Like its Oximiser battery charger, Oxford's paddock stands have been stalwart performers for years, and have just been updated. No-nonsense steel tubing, extra torsional supports, two-position adjustment screws, double castors, and improved handle for more leverage. Front and rear available, with swingarm cups and bobbins hooks supplied.

www.oxprod.com

£59.99 front, £61.99 rear

WINTER WARMERS

There's no such thing as bad weather, only bad preparation! Here's one of Al's foolproof winter outfits, designed for happy riding in the nastiest conditions...

BMW STREET GUARD 2 TROUSERS

£450 (STREET GUARD 3 TREWS)

Actually, if you want the closest thing to the old Hein Gericke Master suit, I reckon the BMW Street Guard suit isn't far off. It's pricey, well-made, super warm and totes waterproof. I've no idea why I mixed and matched trousers and jacket this day, but it worked a treat, apart from not zipping together so well. BMW's textile riding gear rocks, and is just about worth the money. Premium stuff, at a premium price, but recommended.

www.bmw-motorrad.co.uk

HEIN GERICKE 'LOBSTER' PATHAN GLOVES.

£49 WHEN NEW, RUKKA AND REV'IT OPTIONS ALSO AVAILABLE

Again, these are very old, but very good items. And it's the form rather than the specific model we're looking at here. Physics says more surface area equals more heat loss. So keeping your wee pinkies all separate in a normal 'glove' shape is asking for trouble in winter. By sticking your fingers into a split 'claw' shape like these chappies, you're cutting the surface area basically in half, and giving your fingers a fighting chance to retain more heat. It'll take you a while to get used to braking and throttling with them on, but it'll be worth it...

www.hein-gericke.de

ARAI QUANTUM HELMET, WITH PINLOCK VISOR INSERT.

£499.99 (QUANTUM ST COLOURS)

I've been wearing Arai helmets for 25 years now, and it's still my gold standard for liddage. The Quantum is the firm's top-spec road design, so it has extra padding and lining to cut noise and increase comfort on longer trips. Super build quality, vents that work, and a neat chin curtain to seal you in nicely all help on chilly mornings. Add in the supplied Pinlock anti-mist visor insert, and you're sorted for anything. Dark visor is essential for low- winter morning sun, but do take a clear (or yellow) one if you'll be out after dark.

www.whyarai.co.uk

HEIN GERICKE MASTER V JACKET

£449 (WHEN NEW)

So who says bike journos only ever swan about in spanky new kit? This jacket is literally a decade old, but I still love it. I guess having a few options means I've probably only worn it a quarter as much as I would if it was my only winter jacket, so it's lasted four times as long as you'd expect. Or something. Anyway, Hein Gericke were kings of this sort of thing back in the mid 2000s, so it's a shame they went bust in the UK a couple of years back. The best thing about this jacket is that it's super warm, but also very thin, so you can pack in more layers underneath. It's also totally waterproof, and is bursting with sensible little design touches, like colour coded zips – so you don't unzip your liner when you want to get your wallet out. Duh.

Hein Gericke still exists in Germany, but it seems to have lost its way a bit, and the Master suit isn't around any more. There is a Tourer jacket for €250 on the German site, which looks decent. If you can find a good quality used Master jacket though, snap it up...

www.hein-gericke.de

PREXPORT LIVIGNO BOOTS

£139.99

Unpretentious, well-made, decently priced winter boots – what's not to like? The Prexports are comfy, easy to get on and off thanks to a dual zip entry (ooh-er missus), and have been boringly good so far: waterproof of course, and pretty toasty as well. Made from real leather with a waterproof membrane, for £140, I reckon you'll do well here.

www.thekeycollection.co.uk

KEIS HEATED VEST

£162 (KEIS X10 VEST AND BATTERY PACK)

The best defence against the cold is heated gear, and under my kit here, there's a sneaky KEIS heated vest. Since this was me picking up my Hayabusa in March, I didn't have any wiring fitted, so this vest with its own battery pack saved the day. The battery will last for a couple of hours on full, so works for most commutes, and you can also wire the vest into the bike as well. Luxury.

www.motohaus.com

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- EXCEPTIONAL LIFESPAN

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ONE NIGHT IN MACAU

Words: Chris Northover **Pics:** S.Bendall

The Macau GP – a glamour and glitz road race in a shiny town full of casinos and hotels right? That's what we thought, so we hopped on a plane without a second thought.

The Macau GP is a once-a-year street race held on a tiny principality of China for touring cars, GT cars and GP bikes. Well, it's open to GP bikes, but the field is usually made up entirely of hopped-up superbikes and BSB refugees. It's the end of season spectacular for the road racing community, taking place after the British and World Superbike championships have concluded and after all the major road races. You can't just enter Macau. You can't wake up one day, decide you fancy an Armco scuff on the shoulder of your leathers and stick an entry in. It's a bit of a boys' club – if you know the right people, you'll get a ride. If you're known to the right people, but for the wrong reasons, you won't be riding. The bike race is a small part of a big car-based event and the organizers want well turned-out teams with riders who don't sling it into the barriers every five minutes. The grid is not stacked with the best and bravest road racing royalty; there are a handful of the top riders, but that's it.

It is a prestigious event, and winning it is a big deal, but there's another reason why the Macau GP is so popular with the teams, riders and supporters that head out there. The Macau GP is a handy façade to disguise a monumental end of season piss up on the other side of the world from sponsors, BSB officials and prying eyes. What goes on in Macau, stays in Macau. Except chlamydia. That shit comes right on home with you.

Into the storm

Arriving in Macau after a long, drawn out battle with DVT, I've little idea what to expect. I know it was a Portuguese colony, surrendered back to the Chinese with strict mandates that it remain an independent state for 50 years. That means it has its own currency, police force and economy. I also know that Macau is big on gambling and, with a few deductions and chats with people who've been, I'm getting that they're pretty big on strip clubs and, er, extended massages. And I have one last fact helping to shape my expectations – Macau's casinos make more in a week than Vegas does in a month. So when I walk into a wall of foul

"Our hotel is a 1980s throwback, with gold-coloured fittings and marble floors everywhere. And a casino. Obviously."

smelling air at a port next to a sewage outlet, to get jostled and shoved through grimy corridors into litter strewn streets, I'm wondering if this is actually my stop.

We wander through busy, humid streets to our hotel, a 1980s throwback with gold-coloured fittings and marble floors everywhere. And a casino, obviously. And a whole floor dedicated to the art of a really, really, thorough massage. A splash and dash in my shared room sees us fresh(ish) and back out looking for food and beer. With the final MotoGP of the year on, we're all eager to catch the race on TV somewhere and the Roadhouse bar happily obliges. A packed bar, smattered with racing memorabilia, Roadhouse is a popular spot for teams and bike racers to hang out, empty bottles of beer and bench race the nights away. Three screens show the GP

and everyone from team managers and title sponsors to TT winners cheers and shouts the action along. The stench and bustle outside is a million miles away as we collectively indulge in popular pastimes like watching bike racing, pizza eating and, of course, beer disappearing. My fears of being mobbed by prostitutes dissolve and the night slips by. After Roadhouse, we head to the Piano bar in the MGM casino. Lively live music fans the flames of a happy drunken mood and the banter continues until people start falling asleep on bar stools sometime around 4am. I head back to my room, open the door, close the door and head back to the bar downstairs. I was mistaken – I thought I was tired and needed sleep; I actually needed two more beers to give my roommate time to finish his 'room service' appointment.

Macau is not the glitzy, shiny casino town I had envisaged. The streets are dirty, the air so thick you have to chew your breaths and the general mood is impatient and harangued. If you hesitate getting into a lift, you ain' t getting in. Doors are dropped in your face as a matter of course and if, like me, you make the mistake of holding a door open for someone, you'll be there forever. Prosperity is bordered by squalour everywhere you look, with bright garish casinos and hotels butted up against

"Macau is not the glitzy casino town I'd envisaged. The streets are dirty, the air so thick you chew your breath and the general mood is impatient and harangued."

The taxis are pretty quick

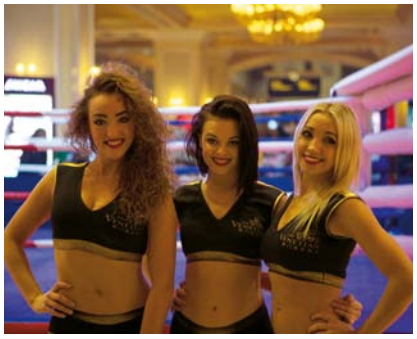
There's class everywhere

filthy, crumbling tower blocks, with their inhabitant's belongings spilling out the balconies and over the roofs. Where Vegas hides its underbelly in the sewers, in Macau the poverty is there for all to see. A dead body in the street (no really) is little more than an inconvenient obstacle slowing the relentless flow of pedestrians. The old boy pulling lumps of dead flesh off his bare feet in the bus shelter doesn't even register with the locals. It's an assault on the senses. Ears are pounded with a busy cacophony of everyday people trying to get through their everyday lives in everyday places with an international GP race cutting through the middle of it all. Your nose tries to jump back on a plane in protest at the foul rotting food in alleyways, the cheap greasy takeaways, air so thick you can see it and, perhaps worst, the stench of second hand aftershave failing to cover up the shame in the hotel lift. The alleyway we cut through to get to the track smells like every ill-advised late night Chinese takeaway you've ever puked up has been imported and left to rot in the sweltering heat of the most densely populated region on earth.

The racing itself is brilliant. So many exotic bikes and cars crammed into a small paddock give the area a real buzz of high-octane excitement. The queues of race vehicles waiting their turn to thread a line through undulating, unforgiving Armco make the hairs of any petrolhead stand on end. But after the racing is done, all hell breaks loose. It's a stressful thing, looking after a top level race bike and things only get worse when the consequences are so high. A mechanical fault that causes a crash on a race bike at, say, Silverstone is a bad thing, an expensive mistake that could injure the rider. The same mistake here, however minor, can be much more terminal. There's not enough room to recover a tankslapper caused by a loose steering damper and there's no run off to slide into when a minor water leak gets fluid on the rear tyre. And to hammer this home, two riders are brought down by a mechanical fault on day one of practice, both escaping major injury, but both destroying their bikes. So with the stress and pressure all week, it's no surprise that once it's all over the teams, riders and hangers-on want to let their hair down. But nothing prepared me for just how big this lot go on a party in Chinatown...

Our final night out starts in a beautiful rustic Italian restaurant. Great food, polite staff and a slow pace provide the Good Food Guide contrast to the madness that lies but a few blocks away. We leave the restaurant full of imported Portuguese lager and prosciutto to find the rest of the racing clan. Another wild, belt-less taxi ride lands at the Venetian - a Chinese copy of Vegas' finest. Mafia-tagged girls usher us into a packed club with a live band and 8 quid drinks. Just as the 30-strong pack of racers, mechanics and hangers-on erupt out the door and steamroll back through the casino with all the grace of Godzilla falling down a mountain. Images of old documentaries of boozing Brits in cheap Spanish resorts flicker into my mind as the crowd smashes a path of raucous swearing and obnoxious attitudes through the bewildered gamblers. When we make it to the next club, MGM's Lion Bar, the mood subdues. Slightly. Stood there, the JD in my hand is doing nothing to numb the consciousness of passing hookers trying to catch my eye, drunk white guys dancing, or they may have been fitting, or both and fat old men feeling up young girls in tight skirts. One more slosh of whiskey is jostled over my shirt and I'm out the door, nodding sympathetically to the bouncer and looking to start a smoking habit. Melodramatic health warnings barely register against the need for an excuse to get out and sit on my own watching the traffic go by. A few keen modified cars racing up the street steal my gaze from the glowing embers and offer some challenge to a rapidly growing theory that Macau is nothing but a debaucherous pit of gambling and prostitution. I wander the streets for another couple of hours, cranking up my life insurance premiums with every tab. I see nothing but hookers and taxi drivers, until I wander through a park and come across a dude with a four-foot samurai sword practicing his moves at midnight. In fairness to the town, I always felt safe, even next to the midnight ninja, and the beer and hookers didn't seem to leave much room for drugs as far as I saw. I find the glowing golden signs outside my hotel, eventually, and retire to my room, full of whiskey and wide eyed astonishment.

6am and the hotel door opens. I know what's coming, the giggles and whispers confirming my fears. An hour of trying not to hear, takes weeks to pass. It's the small noises that get you, as you fight your natural instinct to decipher the sounds. I was only sick in my mouth once, but no amount of mind bleach will get those images out of my brain. After 20 minutes sleep, round two kicks off and I decide it's time I got some breakfast. Even still drunk the cream-coloured chicken sausages and noodles don't make sense for the first meal of the day. I take up smoking again (I quit during the 4am pee in response to the mouth full of ash) and finally find some normal people to speak to. Get me out of here.



The local YWCA does good work

Macau, sponsored by Foxes mints

HALF A PINT OF

AWESOME

Words: Chris Northover **Pics:** Phil Steinhardt

Light, nimble and with enough power to top 100mph – can the KTM RC 390 plug the hole left by the 400cc supersports bikes of the 90s?

We've been given a bit of a bum deal when it comes to licensing laws in the motorcycle world. For a 17-year-old now, you're looking at two years on a 125 and two years on a 45bhp bike before any of the bikes on the pages of this magazine are relevant to you. That's a long time to be stuck learning your craft while your mates in cars are handbrake turning their way into the pants of every teenage girl in sight. So for buying a bike to seem even vaguely like a good idea, we're gonna need some pretty damn exciting models in the A2 license category to ease the pain. Enter the RC 390. A trellis-framed wannabe racer from the crazy orange Austrians; A2 license legal and ready to make being nineteen awesome again.

It's a tough gig making a bike built to fulfill a licence regulation stand out from its competitors. You can't exactly build an amazing motor and shout about all the extra power you have can you? And handing the engineers a bunch of cash and exotic materials to get the weight down won't help you either, not when there's a power-to-weight ratio limit as well. So what's left? Well clearly the target is to be bang on the limit for power and weight, with the best chassis possible and styling that makes people stop and stare. And for a price that won't put off people who haven't yet developed motorcycle credit card irrationality. Like I said, a tough gig. KTM has scored well with its Duke range of naked mini-sports bikes in both the A1 (125cc) and A2 (35kW) classes. And rather than harp on about how everyone's buying naked bikes these days, the Austrian firm decided that sports bikes are still where it's at, launching the RC 125 and RC 390. We tried out the 125 a couple of issues ago and it proved to be ridiculously good fun and, happily, pretty crash-proof. So how could the same recipe, but with another 28hp be anything but brilliant?

Now any smart alec with a calculator to hand and an eye for figures will have spotted that the 15bhp of the RC 125, plus the 28hp mentioned above makes 43hp, 3hp below the limit to comply with the A2 license law. No, KTM isn't short changing you, it's just that the RC 390 only weighs 160kg fully wet, so with 46hp it would fall foul of the 0.2kW per kg power to weight ratio limit. Got that? I know, it's as clear as mud.

What that means from the seat is less top speed than a heavier bike with the full 46hp, but more acceleration everywhere else. And better handling. And better deceleration. With the RC happily topping 100mph anyway, we're pretty sure it has its priorities set in the right place. The engine itself is not a cheapo-looking lashed-together single, built to carry crates full of chickens around the inner cities of India. Instead it's a fuel injected, 375cc, double-overhead cam single, with a forged piston and a stacked gearbox. So you may only get 43hp, but you can walk up to any Street Triple owner and scoff at their cheaper, cast pistons... The fancy components don't end there either, just take a peek at that frame. If a bright orange steel trellis doesn't put a big old smile on your face, then take a quick pulse check; you may well be dead. You've got to be pretty picky to find areas on the RC that don't make it look and feel like an expensive sports bike – the lack of suspension adjustment is one giveaway though.

Almost unavoidably this bike, and the others in its class will be held up against Honda's VFR400R NC30 and Kawasaki's ZXR400 for comparison. It's a bit of a bum deal for the KTM – those old bikes would have cost closer to ten grand new in today's money, so for half that the RC starts to look like a right bargain. Sure it doesn't have the same spec as the mini-superbikes of the nineties, but at least new riders can afford to buy it. And, to be fair, the RC doesn't get its backside kicked in all areas by the old pocket rockets. It undercuts their weight by a good 15-20kg, it drinks a fraction of the fuel, it has ABS and it's new so it won't need fixing every few months. Unless you're a retro obsessive, the RC 390 definitely scores well on the styling front too. It could never be accused of copying another's looks, with that pointy, beaky front end and twin projector beam lamps. Like the 125, the 390 has a soft, styled pillion seat that looks like a single seat cowl, right up to the point you squish it in with a carelessly placed buttock. Comfort and good looks all in one, kinda like Angelina Jolie in a fleecy onesie.

Living the dream

Usually, our first ride on a wee beastie like

this would be at some sunny go kart track with sticky tyres and questionable run-off areas. Ten highly-strung journalists would be unleashed on the track and proceed to fire in passes that would have the FIM stewards eating their own clipboards. Inevitably, one or two bikes would end up in the tyre wall, we'd all have a great time, drink loads of beer afterwards and come home writing about just how bloody good fun the RC 390 is. That's what happened on the RC 125 launch anyway. But for us, the 390 doesn't get that handy headstart to winning a place in our hearts through scraped knee sliders and kart-track victories. It's under five degrees Celsius, the roads are damp and I've got a 60-minute motorway slog to bookend the day's testing. If this bike has anything remotely annoying about it, I'll find it. I'll find it, focus on it and build up an hour of rage about it as I shiver my way back home in a vented leather jacket.

But the RC doesn't need a sunny kart track to make you smile and fill you with confidence. Even as I'm wrestling it out of the garage and down the side of my house, it's already endearing itself to me. Light weight. Why are there not more lightweight bikes in the world? Every little thing you do becomes that bit easier and you quickly build

up confidence to chuck the bike around like a moped. By the end of my road, I'm trying to wheelie and skid the RC on, off and around every white line, speed hump or drop-kerb in sight. Having that sort of confidence makes you want to play about and try new things. I can't help but think that in some ways the A2 license laws are a good thing – bikes like this are perfect for going fast and having fun, with the safety net of not having 200kg trying to follow you into every hedge.

We've all got our favourite little routes to and from our homes, whether it's a cheeky cut through town, a leafy back lane or a speed-hump littered housing estate short cut. You know the routes I'm talking about, the ones you ride day in, day out, know every bump and drain cover on and, dare I say it, have a few favourite spots for the odd wheelie or skid. Well mine is a mix of housing estates, neglected back lanes, roundabouts, traffic lights and bypasses. Lift up out the seat to rattle through the pot holes, clip the drain cover on the inside, hit the brakes at the end of the layby and back it in right up to the junction. No traffic, pull out, sneak in a little wheelie, but be sure to put it down in time for the left/right/left shellgrip combo, dragging a cheeky shoulder in the hedge on the two lefts. Brake and back it in to the junction again. There's 8.5 miles of this nonsense between my house and the motorway, my record is 14 minutes. I manage a healthy 16 minute run on the RC and only when I'm sat in the third lane of the motorway hustling the BMWs and Audis do I stop to think about the size of bike I'm riding. This is a 43hp bike and not for one moment did that occur to me on my morning special stage. I popped wheelies, did skids, jumped speed bumps and charged into corners like I would on any of the 120bhp-plus bikes we usually test and had just as much fun. Sure, the wheelies require a big dollop of commitment with the throttle and clutch, but I still had the same size smile. A

The engine is happy to be thrashed to its full potential, the only protest coming from the occasional missed gearshift. The action is light, but you've got to be deliberate with your foot, or you'll get third gear twice and that reasonable overtake now starts to look a little shaky.

The extra power means that the levels of fun we had on a kart track on the RC 125 translate to the open spaces of A and B roads on the 390. You still end up using all the power, but you're not bored waiting for the next corner. The light weight and sharp steering mean tight junctions and roundabouts can be attacked, not just endured, providing plenty of opportunities to get one over on bigger bikes. The ability to boss the RC about can lead to you throwing it into bends and riding like a ham-fisted idiot. The suspension responds to this input by crashing into the bump stops, bouncing up and down and rolling its rebound adjusters at you in disgust. At least, it would if it had any rebound adjusters. Ridden smoothly, the RC rewards you with precise lines and decent corner speed, but grab it by the scruff of the neck and the soft suspension ties itself in knots. Before I lament the bouncy dampers, I have to remind myself of the alternative – a rock hard race set-up that fires your testicles up into your throat every time you even look at a drain cover. That's fine for someone who bought a sports bike to do trackdays and the occasional Sunday rideout, not so for a new rider who wants to ride everywhere and commute through a UK city with all its potholes on a daily basis.

Conclusion

At the end of a long day testing and riding back and forth for photos while pretending to look warm, I really haven't found anything I don't like about the KTM RC 390. Each time I noticed a niggle or shortfall, I found myself coming back round and justifying it with either the price or the intended market of the bike. No, it doesn't have super-sticky tyres and suspension that urges you to ride around the outside of the entire British Supersport pack at Paddock Hill bend. But that means it also doesn't smash your man pieces to, er, more pieces on a bumpy road; instead you get forgiving suspension with plenty of feedback for building confidence and speed on. And sticky tyres are only fun until you work out how many miles those Supercorsas lasted when you started commuting on them. The ByBre budget Brembo spin-off brakes were powerful enough for the job and while I would like more power and bite, that's exactly the sort of thing that causes trouble with a less experienced rider when they snatch at the lever in a panic. Although the switchable ABS is there to help that situation along anyway. The overall feel of the bike did have a few chinks – it looks pure class, but the occasional missed gear, weird vibrating noise from the bodywork or grumpy fuelling after a fortnight in the garage knocked it down a peg or two. Then I remember that it's a five grand bike and suddenly those small flaws seem a little more forgivable. I'm not about to advocate selling your RSV4 and buying one of these, but I am confident that if this was your first step in to biking, the bullshit licensing laws and over-the-top test paths would all seem worth it. I know that after a fortnight of skidding around on it, I was sorry to see it go and my long termer felt like a tank by comparison. It's amazing just how much fun you can have with a half pint.

KTM RC 390 £4,998

Engine

Type: 373.2cc, liquid cooled, single, DOHC
Bore x Stroke (mm): 89 x 60
Compression Ratio: 12.6 : 1
Fuel system: Single 46mm Bosch throttle body
Transmission: six-speed, wet clutch, cable actuation
Final Drive: Chain

Chassis

Frame: Steel trellis
Front Suspension: 43mm Inverted WP fork, 125mm travel
Rear Suspension: WP monoshock, 150mm travel
Brakes: (F) Single 300mm disc, ByBre radial mount four-piston caliper (R) Single 230mm disc, single piston floating caliper
Tyres: (F) 110/70-17 (R) 150/60-17

Geometry

Wheelbase: 1,340mm
Head angle: 33.5 degrees
Trail: 88mm
Seat height: 820mm
Weight (claimed, full fuel load, ready to ride): 160kg
Fuel capacity: 10 litres

Performance

Peak power (Claimed): 43hp
Peak torque (Claimed): n/a

Rider Aids

Switchable ABS

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READERS' HELP

YOUR PROBLEMS... SORTED!

We don't know how lucky we are these days when working on old or obscure bikes. Back in the 1990s, you had to shell out a fortune on factory service manuals – nowadays you can find most of them online, and YouTube is packed with instructional videos. Last resort? Owner's groups are full of knowledgable types, check them out...

Alan Dowds

81 **Q&A**
Drilling tips, how to keep your frame numbers legible, and choosing the right lawyer for your bike crash claims

82 **60 MINUTES WELL SPENT**
The nights are getting shorter, but you could still do with some extra lumens out there. LED driving lights fitted, in an hour.

88 **LONG-TERM TEST BIKES**
Getting ready for tearful farewells to the Hayabusa, Monster 1200 and Daytona 675.

Q&A

Every month, we answer your biking problems. From riding tips to mechanical maladies, we're here to help. Email us your problems and we'll get expert advice to find the most effective solution to put a grin back on your face

WRITE TO: *SuperBike Help, SuperBike Magazine, Blaze Publishing, Lawrence House, Morrell Street, Leamington Spa, CV32 5SZ*
E-mail: superbike@superbike.co.uk

Give us a shout on the SuperBike Facebook page or DM us @SuperBikemag

The law man

I have had a pretty serious accident whilst riding my motorbike and my insurers have recommended that I use their appointed solicitor; however I have never heard of them, I would prefer to use a specialist solicitor with motorbike claims experience. Do I have to use the solicitors appointed by my insurers?

GEOFF BOSWELL, Liverpool.

Hi Geoff! The simple answer is 'no'. If you have Legal Expense insurance cover your Legal Expense insurer may contact you to arrange your representation, however, you are free to choose your own legal representatives and you should not feel pressured to instruct a solicitor chosen for you. We would recommend that you instruct a specialist firm of solicitors with a great knowledge of motorbike claims.

Having said that, if your case is fairly straightforward, and you just want to get things moving, it might be just as easy to go with the solicitor that's been recommended.

Visit Zest Legal on Facebook and Twitter to find out more.

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60 MINUTES WELL SPENT

LED DRIVING LAMPS

LIGHTS, FANTASTIC!

Winter's here, it's dark as hell on the commute, and there are still plenty of bikes with rotten headlights. Get yourself seen, and see more clearly with a set of sweet LED auxiliary driving lights, fitted in about an hour...

1 THE LIGHT STUFF

We got hold of a set of these new Denali LED driving lights from R&G Racing. They're really nice quality, and best of all, they come with their own integrated wiring harness – so you don't need to faff about with relays, Scotchlok connectors and all that old toot.

2 ON THE WIRE

The Denali setup has its own switch, wiring into the battery, and a small tap into the bike wiring to switch them on and off with the ignition. The connectors are good waterproof ones, and the wiring is top notch too. R&G also sent us some universal mounting brackets.

3 BOLTED ON

First job is to find a physical location for the light mounts. There are various options – if you have an adventure bike you'll maybe have crash bars or headlight guards to fit on to. The Hayabusa is a bit Spartan in these areas – we could have gone for one of the mudguard mounting bolts, but I tried them on the axle pinch bolts. The lights are very, er, light, so I don't expect any problems with the extra mass on there. I swapped out the stock pinch bolt for a longer (yet slightly grubby) one from my spares box (I'll replace them with nice new stainless ones when I get the chance…)

4 LIGHT BALANCE

I trimmed the mounting brackets down a bit so they fitted flush against the fork bottom, and tightened the pinch bolt up to the correct torque. Then the lamp mount simply bolted on. Repeat on the other side, and we're done.

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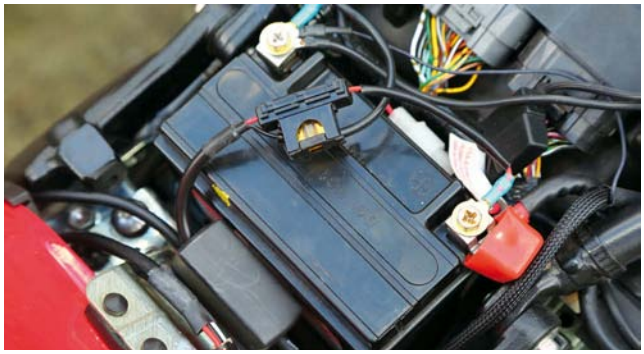
5 POWER SUPPLY

Time for the wiring. There's a control box, with a 12v+ and ground connection, two connectors to the lamps, and a connector to the switch, There's also a pair of flyleads which control the lamps. One wire connects to a live switched feed, with a simple tap connector, so the LED lights are only on with the ignition, to stop you leaving them on. The second feed is optional – you can connect it to the bike's high-beam feed, and the Denali lights will run at dual brightness, dimming on dip, and coming on full with high beam.



6 HIT THE SWITCH

Find a spot for the switch, and attach it with the self-adhesive pad. Run the wiring back to the control box and connect it up.

7 ROUTE ONE

Route the lamp wiring up the fork legs, securing with cable ties. Make sure they're not rubbing against wheels or discs, or interfering with suspension or steering movements. Run the wiring harness up and under the tank, and through to the lamp connectors, again making sure the wires aren't going to get damaged, or get in the way. Secure with cable ties again.

8 ON THE WIRE 2

Now you can tap into a live feed for the activation wire. You can use the tail light wire, or rear brake light switch, whatever's handy. If you want to have dual brightness (I didn't bother), find the high-beam 12v feed and tap the second wire into that.

9 LIGHT UP YOUR LIFE

Push the button…and you should have glorious bright blueish light. It's fair to say that modern LED lighting makes old halogen bulbs look like something from the 1950s. The Denali system is only about 20 watts of power draw, but the lights give out masses more light than the 60w halogen chappies in the main headlamp.

Top right shows our Busa with just its headlight, *right below* shows the Denali lights on full beam, with the Busa still on dipped headlight. Quite a difference…

THANKS:
R&G Racing (www.rg-racing.com) for the Denali light kit.

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CHRISTIAN GROEGER

German firm Bosch is one of the giants in automotive electronics – and it does plenty of work in the bike world too. Its ABS, traction control, engine management and telematics systems help make bikes like the BMW S1000RR, Ducati Multistrada, and KTM Super Duke the awesome high-tech weapons they are.

We spoke to the firm's Christian Groeger, technical manager for motorcycle ABS, about traction control systems. He's our Expert this month.

Tyre worries

Q Could modern traction control deal with tyres from the early nineties? How different would my new bike perform if it had really worn old tyres on it?
Rob Thomas

A Bosch introduced its first motorcycle traction control MTC in 2012 with the KTM 1190 Adventure. Relating to the development, we do the application with the tires which were specified by the bike manufacturer in a very wide range of conditions. At the end, the customer is responsible for the bike.

Power buzz

Q Have you found an optimum amount of power for the average road rider? i.e. what sort of power can people use before they start using TC?
Kris Jones

A No, there is no optimum amount. The possible amount of power depends strongly on the conditions like temperature, tires etc. - and also on the driving skills of the rider.

Future shock

Q What's next for traction control? How much control of the front tyre can we have?
Daniel Weisse

A Next step is the lean-angle dependent control. Bosch has already launched the motorcycle stability control MSC in 2013. This safety system comprises a lean-angle dependent brake control as well as traction control. MSC currently is the best safety system available.

Safety first?

Q What are the differences involved for Bosch in making a safety TC system compared to a performance one?
Brian Gunnar

A There is no difference. A Bosch traction control system is always designed as a safety system for use on public roads.

Map reading

Q How much 'mapping' does a Bosch system need to suit each individual bike? How widely do the system parameters vary between the same Bosch TC setup on two different bikes?
Luke Parker

A This depends strongly on the demands of our customer and the

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technical condition (e.g. single cylinder, twin etc). Our target is to provide a system with which we can fulfill every customer's wish.

All TC, all the time

Q Do you see all bikes having TC in the future? Even scooters?

James McDonald

A Hopefully yes. Although TC can nowadays mainly be found on high performance motorcycles, the system also makes riding on bikes and scooter with lower performance safer. In the case of slippery road conditions for example, every bike benefits from a TC system.

No more spills

Q Can TC make a bike 'uncrashable'? Will it ever?

Franco Brown

A Up to now, no. TC is only one of the functions that Bosch developed to make motorcycle riding safer and more fun. The Bosch MSC system combines TC with ABS, eCBS and further functions. It therefore is a huge step towards safer riding. Bosch's clear target is accident-free, dynamic and convenient riding for every rider.

Bolt on traction?

Q Could you make a bolt-on aftermarket TC system that I could fit to my old 1995 GSX-R750?

Dan Wells

A No, we need an interface to control the torque of the engine. It is not possible to control a Bowden wired carburetor and the signal quality of switching off the ignition spark is too bad.

Head job

Q Working on my first wheels-up rebuild, on an old ZZ-R1100, and I'm using it to teach myself about bikes as I go along! I've got a workshop manual, and getting stuck in. The next job I have on the list is to change out the rotten old steering head bearings. I've got the front end apart, and the top half of the bearings is easy enough. But how the hell do you get the bottom bearings off the steering head thing? There's no way to get in about them that I can see!

Bob Chivers

A Of all the crap jobs on a bike, that need special tools, this is a classic Bob. Ideally, you'll have a set of long-reach bearing pullers, with a bolt-together collar that tightens up behind the bottom bearing race, and then some long threaded bars and a yoke that goes across the top of the steering stem. But you don't, do you? So you either shell out a load of cash for one, borrow from a mate or friendly bike shop, or you go gorilla style. In the past, we've used a cold chisel and a lot of care to carefully get the bottom race tapped off the bottom yoke. We've also been very bad, and used an angle grinder to cut a big notch into the race, and then shattered it off with said chisel and club hammer. None of this is very pretty though...

Numbers racket

Q I've got a mate at an industrial coating place who's able to get my CBR600F frame all nicely renovated, stripped and coated with a thick ceramic-style anti-rust coating. I'm worried about the frame number disappearing though under all the ceramic stuff. Will that be a problem?

Terry Davis

A Your mate should be able to advise better than us Terry, but in general, most coating tech will be able to keep the frame number at least semi-legible. Some frames have the number on a rivetted plated – in which case you just drill it off, and refit it once the frame is coated. If you have a stamped number, then worst case, you might need to rub the coating down a bit to make the numbers stand out. It's probably only a big deal if you're selling the bike later, any new owner will want to check the numbers against the V5.

What's the drill?

Q Can you help me out with some tips on drilling stuff out? I thought I knew how to use the old Makita – I've put up plenty of shelves myself, being a single woman! But I'm fixing up an old CB500 Honda, and there's an exhaust bolt snapped in place. I'm trying to drill it out, but not getting very far. The drills I have seem to be too blunt, or the wrong type maybe? Help!

Sarah James

A Drilling tough metal is a faff Sarah, no doubt about it. There are a few top tips though – first, as you say, make sure you have some new, fresh drill bits of the correct type. The ones you use for walls in the house won't work, neither will drills for wood or plastic. You want HSS – high speed steel bits, which are often coated in a gold finish. Don't be tempted to use super-high speeds and lots of pressure either – that works on masonry, but with hard steels, you'll just wear the drill bit out too quickly. Finally, use some lubricant to help the drill cut – even a quick squirt of WD40 every few seconds will cool the cutting head, and let it cut better. Good luck...

DUCATI MONSTER 1200

■ **MILES:** 1,640 ■ **MODIFICATIONS:** A solid lock and a warm coat for the winter

If you haven't read my editor's column at the front, you might have missed me saying that I've bought the magazine this month. What that mostly means is I've had my big boy pants on. Lots of meetings, lots of head scratching and lots of wondering exactly how I'm going to pay the rent next year. To be honest, I've not had a huge amount of time to ride this month. I did manage a few stolen rides around business meetings and pretending to be a grown up. Obviously I managed to find the time to jet to California to ride the new Scrambler, but that was real work, so it doesn't count. I'm happy to report that the big Monster is much better at tearing into town traffic in the middle of winter than I expected.

One issue I have had since I moved back to London (you may have missed me spouting off about my move to the Kent coast in the summer, well it didn't work out and we were back in the big smoke within a couple of months), is my old fears of theft haven't disappeared. I'm on a busy South London street (just the way I like it, it appears) and there's room for a bike round the front of the house, but I don't feel like I can risk it until there are Fort Knox levels of security to reassure me. What that means is this bike lives in the house, or in the garden if we have friends round and space gets tight. Thankfully we don't have carpet downstairs (not prison slang) so wheeling it through the house isn't too much of a pain. I have vivid memories of my wife's face when she came downstairs in our old house to see me trying to sneak a BSA B40 through the house. I'd have got away with as well if the thing wasn't oozing oil onto our cream carpet...

Anyway, the Monster 1200 is still in my grubby mitts, which means Ducati must have forgotten I have it! Yes! Look forward to daily updates on this bike and the other long termers on the fleet on our website, which you can keep up with if you follow us on Twitter and Facebook.

DUCATI
SHARK

TRIUMPH DAYTONA 675R

■ **MODS:** Vanishing cloak ■ **MILES:** 85 sad ones back to Hinckley

■ **CONTACT:** www.triumphmotorcycles.co.uk, www.reactiveparts.com

Well it had to end sooner or later; it's that time of year when spoilt wotsits like myself get all mopey and grumpy because they have to hand back the keys to their free bikes. Worse still, we have to wait up to two months before our next long-term free bike arrives, can you imagine? The other standard game at this time of year is scrambling to find all the standard parts for a bike to undo all the modifications we've made throughout the season. And there's always at least one bolt missing. But not so on the Triumph – I don't think I've ever had a long termer that I've changed so little on. And it's not through laziness – I love a shiny new thing as much as the next man – it's more because there's genuinely so little I would change. There's no slightly sticky fuelling to get fixed, no power deficit to address and no excess weight to ditch. Obviously more power and less weight is always good, but the Triumph has never felt like it desperately needed more of either.

The changes I did make were limited to shiny trinklets, what can I say; we've all got our inner magpie to placate. Flip-up brake and clutch levers from LighTech added some nice feel and a bit more adjustment to the hand control region. But my favourite bolt-on was the set of LighTech chain adjusters, with an indexed adjuster bolt that make adding chain tension as pleasurable as counting on clicks of compression damping. If you're into that sort of thing. The chain adjusters I fitted were actually off a 2012 model Triumph, so the fit is a bit more fiddly than usual – LighTech is working on an update for the new model.

The absolute best thing I've done all year with the Triumph is just ride it. Every snatched Sunday morning blast, last minute trackday or trip up to Bruntingthorpe has made me curse not getting more time out on it. At Bruntingthorpe, the Triumph excels at long, high-speed wheelies close to the balance point and it has a jump-on-and-go feel to it that makes you instantly at home. On track the 675R shows just what it was developed to do – obliterate knee and elbow sliders lap after lap. The chassis is razor sharp, yet stable, allowing you to practice being pin point accurate with your lines. And you never seem to get that urge to call it a day before the last session, because it's not trying to batter your Arai in with a 200bhp lump hammer. But let's face it, trackdays and airfields are great fun on any bike. My standout moment for this year on the Triumph was on a road test against the MV F3 in Wales. Shaun was running the test, so the pressure was off for a change and I was just out enjoying a sunny Welsh mountain pass on the Trumpy. "I'll just nip off and warm the tyres..." I shouted to Shaun and the photographer. I can specifically remember thinking I should really be turning around and heading back, but then I'd spot some more good corners. It took me thirty minutes to 'warm the tyres', in which time I'd carved myself a nice little groove into the Welsh tarmac. I had a ball that day, on my own little mainland TT course, living out road racing fantasies as I dodged the sheep and disgruntled photographers. If I could have any bike, would it be a 675R? Hmm, maybe after the Ducati Superleggera yes, but the Daytona is definitely near the top of my all-time favourite bikes list. And it should be on yours too. While everyone else is chasing headline power figures and electronic everything, the connoisseur's choice has three cylinders and the best handling of any class. Elbow dragging is so much cooler than power wheelies.

YAMAHA MT-09

■ **MODS:** Ridiculous Lights ■ **MILES:** 4,689

■ **CONTACT:** www.rg-racing.com

OK, I'll admit it, I got distracted. I had planned to sort a fuelling module, fit the Samco hoses and wire in my custom ABS switch to the MT-09 this month. But then it got dark. An old pal of mine and long-time Land Rover obsessive recently got his first bike on the road. He's an engineering bloke, who loves to fix stuff and solve problems. After his first night ride, I got a call – "Hi Chris, I must be doing something wrong here. I've just been for a ride in the dark and I can't see a bloody thing – the headlights on the bike are crap, reflections from signs glare in my visor and I think I'm going to crash everytime a car comes the other way. What's going on?"

The bike in question is a late nineties Suzuki GSX600F, but even if it was a new-un, we all know how good the headlights aren't on anything sporty. I had to explain to a man who likes fixing things with a hammer that that was it, that's the reality of riding bikes in the Winter. Unless you buy a big ol' tourer with a car headlight stuffed in the front of it, night time riding is a mixture of guesswork and sonar. Too bad if your sonar's on the blink. The thing is, I'm used to it – years of riding on the road through Winter have made me accept that past October, I ain't gonna be able to see much. But my man Boydy had a point – why have we settled for guessing where the road goes? And then a rummage through the boxes in the garage looking for something else unearthed the box of rally spotlights and the cogs started turning once more...

Thankfully for the MT-09, the nice people at R&G Racing also do auxiliary lighting, so before it ended up with a pod of four 6" Cibie rally lamps on the handlebars I gave them a shout. So instead of 20 kilos of lights draining my battery and leaving me stranded, I've got a swanky pair of Denali D4 LED combo lamps. Each lamp has two flood lights and two spot lights and only draws 20W of power – that's the beauty of LEDs. And the lighting claims are pretty damn impressive too – a 550-foot effective range is about three times further than your typical standard lights. And about a million times further than the lights on my mate's 15-year old GSX-F. So no more crashing into hedges at night for me, well not with lights as the excuse anyway. As soon as the D4s are on, we've got an extra special night road test planned – keep an eye out in a future issue. SF

SHOEI
YAMAHA
SuperBike
LG63
HBL

SUZUKI HAYABUSA

■ **MODS:** extra lighting, return to sender ■ **MILES:** a run round the block...

All good things come to an end, as they say, and since the Hayabusa has undoubtedly been A Good Thing for me this year, it seems unavoidable that we're coming to the end. The nice man at Suzuki has sent out the form email of doom, and the big red Bus is already a week overdue.

So as I muddle through the shit job of returning her to standard trim for the van journey back to Milton Keynes, I've been thinking back to the good times. All those effortless ban-level high-speed motorway miles. The breathtaking first ride on a twisty road after I'd fitted the SC Projects four-into-one system, Power Commander and Translogic quickshifter. The destruction of an Audi RS4 on the M40.

The downsides? Well, apart from the obvious pitfalls of riding a 190bhp motorbike around the speed-camera-infested roads of England, not so much.

Of course, the Busa suffers a bit from the tech malaise of many Japanese bikes since the credit crunch of 2008 wrecked much of the bike industry. There's no traction control, trip computer or ride-by-wire cleverness, and the ABS setup, while good, is a generation behind the best systems out there. To be fair though, I've never missed TC throughout the year, and the ABS hasn't let me down either. I'd still love a BMW-style trip computer though: the analogue fuel gauge is fine, but I do prefer a nice wee LCD readout of miles remaining. And when something like BMW's S1000R super naked has cruise control and heated grips, why the fuck hasn't my continent-crushing megablaster? Eh? Bah!

The only other bad times on the Busa have been of my own making. A horrendous two day period when I managed to drop the beastie not once but twice. First time was trying to get her onto a small paddock stand to swap out the wheels for some new Metzeler rubber. The hooks slipped on the bobbins, and once the 230-odd kilo beastie started to topple, there was no stopping her. The second time, a day or so later was even more ignominious. I was loading up the top box with camera gear for the SuperBike Live! event, with the bike on the sidestand. As I gave the topbox a final push onto the rack to make sure it was locked in tight, the bike just rolled forward up and over, and folded the sidestand back. Bang, down again. Both sides of the fairing scuffed in 48 hours. I could have cried...

And crying is what I'll be doing into my beer for the next few months, as I contemplate life without the brilliant big Hayabusa. Although looking out the window at the -8° frost and ice, maybe a month or so without a 190bhp bike won't be such a hardship...

ONLINE FUN

One unexpected delight this year has been the Hayabusa Scotland Facebook page upon which I found myself, added by the folks there. It's a nice little group of hardcore 'Busa riders from north of the border, and it's been great to see how dedicated they are to the cause. The Hayabusa is a genuine enthusiast's bike – people mod them, tweak them, customise them to their own plan, and it's clear how solid the passion is for the big Suzuki. Well worth a bit of your online time if you're a Busa (or B-King) rider up north...

YAMAHA SR500

MODS: Wiring started, seat base done **MILES:** Oh no, not yet

I bagged the Ducati Scrambler launch this month. This is a bike that will basically be like hipster catnip; they'll be flocking to Ducati dealerships by the thousand to pay their money and ride away on a ready-made bike. It got me thinking about how much these guys are going to miss out on. In my mind, the whole point of these bikes is as much about building them as it is about riding them and trying to look cool. It's all well and good jamming a stupid open face helmet on and cutting about like you're too busy looking good, but what happens when someone asks who built your bike, or if god forbid, it breaks down. Building a bike like this one has given me a fresh appreciation for time spent on the tools. The bike is ready to be picked up from the guys at caferacerseats.co.uk up in Sheffield, they've sorted the tank and tail unit and I'll be spending my time freezing my ass off in the workshop mocking the thing up before it goes for paint and powdercoat mid January. Tony's son Craig has built a lovely seat base and integrated all the wiring for the rear light into it. I'm almost embarrassed to admit that I've played no part in that bit, but seeing Craig's handiwork on the other bikes in the shop means that at least one bit will work. I thought now would be a good time to share some of the inspiration for the bike so far. I've spent an unhealthy amount of time looking at what other people have done to their SR500s. The images on this page are the ones I like the most and if mine is anywhere near the same, I'll be a happy man. SF

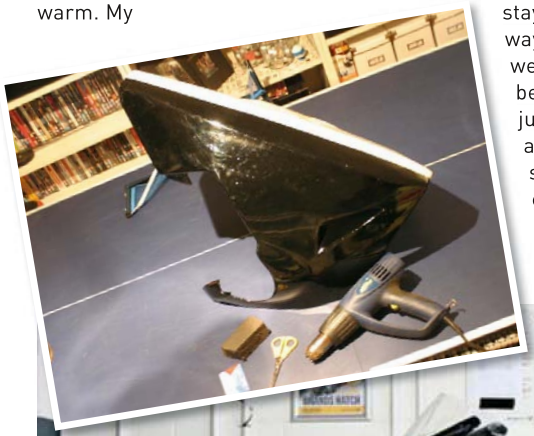
YAMAHA R1 RACEBIKE

THIS MONTH: BODYWORK WRAPPING....

■ **MODS:** Vinyl wrapping ■ **MILES:** About 3 metres ■ **CONTACT:** www.idpmoto.com

Nailed it. In my head, I figured that vinyl wrapping the R1's bodywork would be quicker, easier and cleaner than painting it. I did have a feeling that if it really was that easy, everyone would be at it, but without trying for myself I wasn't prepared to accept that. Stubborn? Yes. Naive? Probably. But I was half right. I went for the full cheap DIY approach, ordered a load of vinyl wrap off that auction site, totaling about forty quid. As I said last month, my target was to make the R1 look like Nori Haga's '98 YZF750R, so my living room was soon filled with red, black and white vinyl. My biggest draw for wrapping not painting was the ability to sit and do it indoors in the warm. My better half has the patience of a saint, but I reckon turning the lounge into a spray booth would be a step too far. I've painted in my garage before and it always ends with everything I own covered in a fine dust of whatever colour I'm painting. Vinyl wrapping on the other hand, just requires a bit of space, somewhere fairly warm and, it turns out, a lot of patience.

Step one was to give the panels a good clean – no sticker is going to stay put on a panel plastered in grease. I used brake cleaner, but you can get proper panel cleaner if you're feeling flash. Don't make the mistake of cleaning the panel, then picking it back up with grubby hands – give those mitts a wash too and you'll give the wrap much more chance of staying put. There are a ton of different ways to apply a vinyl wrap, including wetting the panel to aid positioning before squeezing the water out, or just diving right in. I went for a dry application using a heat gun to stretch the wrap around the various contours of the fairings. It took me a good two hours solid work to wrap half the bellypan. So not the quick fix I was hoping for, but I'm really pleased with the results. After the whole panel was covered, I went back over it with the heat gun and a sharp knife to pop and smooth out the few bubbles that slipped through the net. By my calculations, it'll take me another eight hours to finish the wrap, so I've got a good few nights' work to go. But I'm sticking by the plan – it may be time consuming, but it's cheap, effective so far and doesn't involve me painting the MT-09 red, white and black on the other side of the garage. Hopefully I'll have a few more panels finished next month...



KEVIN CARMICHAEL'S TRIUMPH SCRAMBLER

If you've been to a Triumph event over the past few years, then you've probably come across Scottish stunt rider Kevin Carmichael. The Ayrshire wheelie king has been an official factory rider for the Hinckley firm for much of the last decade, and he's the loonie you see wheelying Rocket IIIs, spinning up Speed Triples, and dragging the tail of Street Triples at stunt shows across the world.

But his latest bike is a little bit different. "I do a lot of work in Italy," said Kevin. "They love the naked Triumphs over there, and one of the Triumph specialist tuning firms, Free Spirits, in Vicenza, offered to build me a bike. So I decided to go for a Scrambler, something a bit different. I love it because it's unique as a stunt bike, and it sounds and looks great as well!"

At first glance, the Scrambler doesn't look so far from stock. But the closer you look, the more you see that every single part has been tweaked, modded, improved. At the heart is the parallel-twin 865cc engine from Triumph's Classic range – hardly a firebreathing stunt motor, but it's been helped out with some open pipes and Sprint individual air filters. A Dobeck Performance TFI box looks after the fuelling changes needed.

On the chassis front, even Kevin would have to work pretty hard to stoppie his brains out with the stock bike's flimsy forks and single stopper. So Free Spirits threw on a full Speed Triple front end – USD forks in custom yokes and Brembo calipers, plus enormous Newfren 340mm discs and stronger springs. Out back, a pair of high-spec long-travel 400mm Bitubo shocks give massively improved damping, loads more wheel travel, and with the riser mount blocks, give the stock swingarm a much more rakish angle.

Happily, the skinny standard wheels are tossed in favour of some awesome Kineo spoked rims, from Italian firm In Motion. There's now a 180-section rear tyre instead of a 130-section, which meant a nicely-machined offset gearbox sprocket was needed to take the chain run out past the tyre edge. Free Spirits also fitted a sweet little chain tensioner, to help with

the chain run when Kevin uses the large 65-tooth rear sprocket Free Spirits came up with for super-slow wheelies...

After all that, stuff like the tasty crash protectors, ignition relocation plate, dual-four-piston rear brake setup and bespoke levers, footpegs, dash, rear tail unit all seems moot – but it's all super quality stuff, and rounds the Free Spirits Scrambler off a treat...

Kevin will be campaigning the Scrambler all through next season, together with his new TTS supercharged Rocket III. Check him out at a stunt show near you! Details at www.kevincarmichael.com, or on his Facebook page. Check out Free Spirits at www.freespirits.it.

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With testing on hold and the Christmas hols upon us, what's a MotoGP world champion to do? Go dirt track racing of course...

If it were us, then a MotoGP champion's closed season would look a bit like *The Wolf of Wall Street*, only with more strippers. And extra drugs. That is, perhaps, why we're not the MotoGP champion. This year at least. So what did Marc Marquez really do on his month off? Well, he went to the Superprestigio dirt track race in Barcelona. It's a fancy-pants invitational race, where the great and the good of world-class Tarmac and dirt racing get together for an oval knees-up under the stadium lights, on converted MX bikes. Normally, the US contingent cleans up – it is their sport after all. But this year, Marquez pipped Jared Mees to the post in the Superfinal, both finishing ahead of Spanish/American legend Kenny Noyes...

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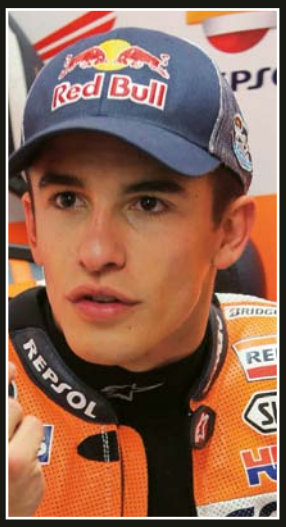
TAXING ISSUES

Marc Marquez gave a press briefing at the Superprestigio, aimed at clearing the air over his move to the Pyrenean tax haven of Andorra. He'd received criticism in Spain over the perceived tax avoiding implications of the move, but gave an emotional statement refuting the attacks.

"Well I'm 21 now and I've always been living with my parents, so like many young people I've decided to create my own space and my own home. I've picked Andorra because I've been there many winters and many times during the year. I will continue to be there many winters and much of the time because for physical training it's an ideal place. Who knows what will happen in the future. I pay my taxes in Spain and will still do so next year."

"There has been a lot of opinion about this and everyone is entitled to their view, but I think some of the criticism of me has been harsh. As a sportsman you never know how long your career will last. When I was 19 I was almost at the point of leaving motorcycle racing as I had a problem with my vision. The only thing I want to do is keep enjoying myself and keep riding my bike."

Andorra has a tax deal with Spain, which means that Spanish citizens still have to pay tax in Spain for five years after they move. So Marquez won't be reaping any instant financial benefits. But with the Spanish economy still in a parlous state, and youth unemployment particularly high, a tiny bit of shine has come off his public persona at home.



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BRITS ABROAD

2015 could be crunch year for British riders in WSB

For whatever reason, UK riders have generally put on a good show in the WSB paddock, and 2015 looks like being no exception. Kawasaki will be looking for great things from new signing Jonathan Rea, who had stagnated a bit at Honda. Team Green has been putting in the hard yards with its ZX-10R over the past few years, in total contrast to Honda, which is, essentially, still racing a bike from 2008. Rea joins Tom Sykes, making for a pretty fearsome setup for any prospective title challengers.

Challengers like Chaz Davies and Alex Lowes, on the factory Ducati and Suzuki respectively. Davies has been on the edge of greatness for a while, and with the Ducati team now a very well-oiled outfit, could 2015 see him make a great leap forward? Lowes has also settled in well at Crescent Suzuki, and while the elderly GSX-R will be a bit of a hurdle, Paul Denning's team did great work last year, and has been working hard on developing the Suzuki. Having Randy de Puniet in the garage can only help – he's a man who knows his way round a race paddock.

Finally, there are a couple of big names who will be looking to turn things around a bit. The Leons Camier and Haslam haven't been at the top of their game of late, and while it's not exactly the last chance saloon, both will be eager to get back up top where they belong. Haslam looks to be in the better position, with a ride on the Red Devils Roma Aprilia. The RSV is a proven title winner, and Leon's been around long enough to know how to work with an Italian team. He's pretty much the lead rider too, so will benefit from that advantage.

Leon Camier's got a more interesting task. MV Agusta has taken its race efforts back in house after splitting with Russian team Yakhnich , and has a top man heading up the race department in Brian Gillen. Camier impressed, and was impressed, when he stepped in to ride the Agusta at Laguna Seca last season, and he inked a deal with MV at the Milan show. The F4RR superbike is packed with potential, and if Camier gets lucky, it could be his ticket back to the top.

CONFIRMED WSB RIDERS/TEAMS AS WE WENT TO PRESS:

KAWASAKI RACING TEAM
- Tom Sykes
- Jonathan Rea

RED DEVILS ROMA APRILIA
- Leon Haslam
- Jordi Torres

DUCATI SBK
- Chaz Davies
- Davide Giugliano

CRESCENT SUZUKI
- Alex Lowes
- Randy de Puniet

MV AGUSTA
- Leon Camier

PATA HONDA
- Sylvain Guintoli
- Michael van der Mark

ALTHEA DUCATI
- Nico Terol
- Matteo Baiocco

JR RACING BMW
- Toni Elias
- Ayrton Badovini

BMW ITALIA
- Sylvain Barrier

PEDERCINI KAWASAKI
- David Salom

ERIK BUELL RACING
- Niccolo Canepa
- Larry Pegram

GRILLINI KAWASAKI
- Christophe Ponsson

TEAM TOTH BMW
- Imre Toth

BARNI DUCATI
- Leandro Mercado

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TAS/TYCO SPLITS WITH SUZUKI, MOVES TO BMW FOR 2015

Having spent much of the current century with Suzuki, the TAS team from Northern Ireland has moved on for 2015, swapping its GSX-R1000s for BMW S1000RRs in British Superbike and road race duties. Michael Laverty and Tommy Bridewell will campaign the S1000RR in BSB, in place of John Hopkins and Josh Walters, who had a disappointing 2014. Laverty's had an interesting time in MotoGP, riding the Paul Bird CRT bike for the past two years, while Bridewell comes from a promising third place BSB finish for Milwaukee Yamaha last season.

BMW had its best-ever year in UK racing last year, and the Munich firm is set to expand on that. As well as factory backing for the BSB team, BMW UK is supporting the TAS efforts in road racing for 2015. Guy Martin, Alastair Seeley and William Dunlop will pilot TAS Tyco BMW S1000RRs at the Northwest 200, Isle of Man TT and the Ulster GP. The Buildbase team is also back for 2015, with Ryuichi Kiyonari keen to avenge his narrow loss to Shane Byrne last season.

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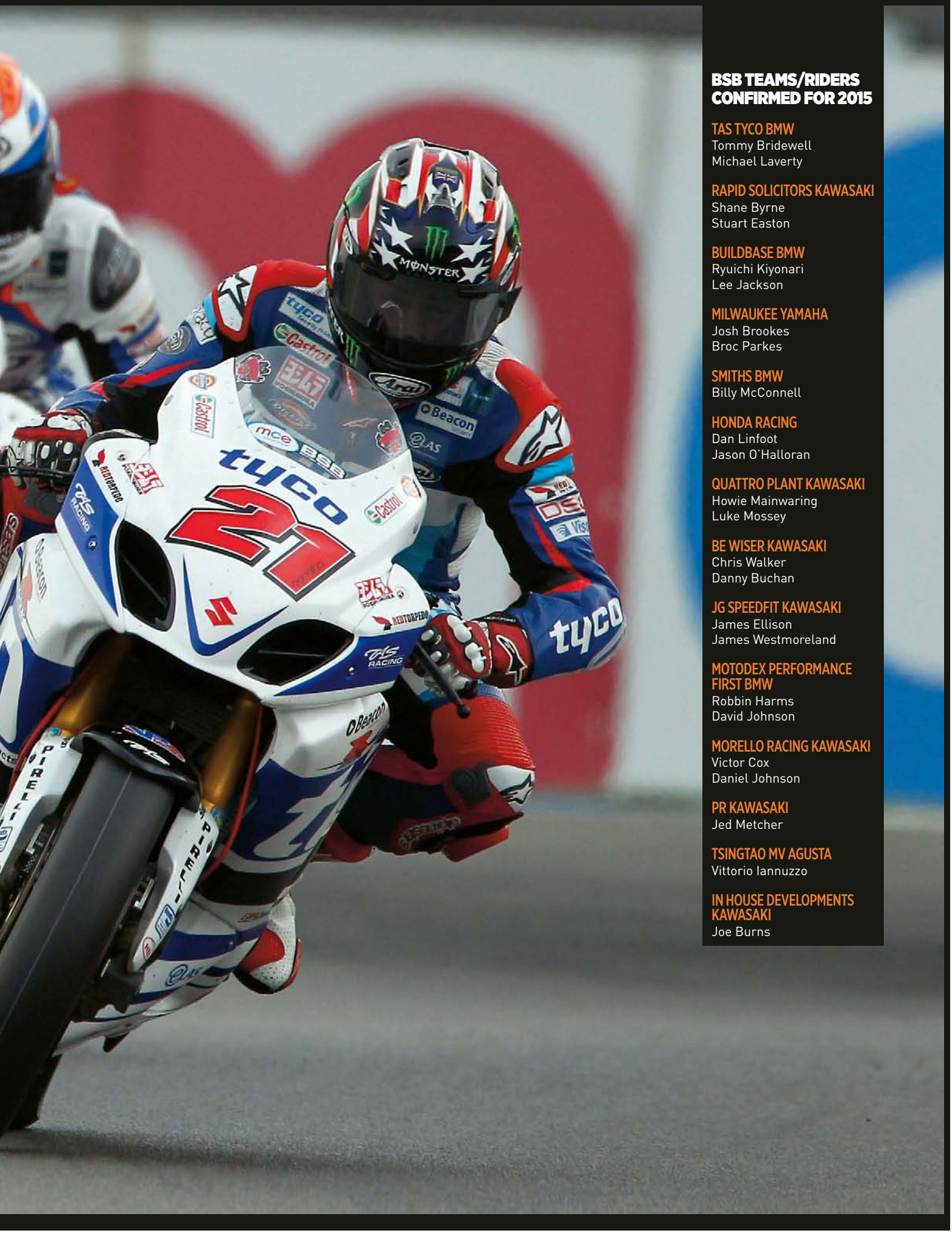

BSB TEAMS/RIDERS CONFIRMED FOR 2015

TAS TYCO BMW
Tommy Bridewell
Michael Laverty

RAPID SOLICITORS KAWASAKI
Shane Byrne
Stuart Easton

BUILDBASE BMW
Ryuichi Kiyonari
Lee Jackson

MILWAUKEE YAMAHA
Josh Brookes
Broc Parkes

SMITHS BMW
Billy McConnell

HONDA RACING
Dan Linfoot
Jason O'Halloran

QUATTRO PLANT KAWASAKI
Howie Mainwaring
Luke Mossey

BE WISER KAWASAKI
Chris Walker
Danny Buchan

JG SPEEDFIT KAWASAKI
James Ellison
James Westmoreland

MOTODEX PERFORMANCE FIRST BMW
Robbin Harms
David Johnson

MORELLO RACING KAWASAKI
Victor Cox
Daniel Johnson

PR KAWASAKI
Jed Metcher

TSINGTAO MV AGUSTA
Vittorio Iannuzzo

IN HOUSE DEVELOPMENTS KAWASAKI
Joe Burns

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ROAR!
BANZAI!
AUTOBAHN
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TOPS!
EXPLODE!
NO LOSS! - I'LL WIN ANOTHER BECAUSE I OWN THE FLIPPIN' MAG.
PETER PETROSKO SUZUKI
CAHN!
RUST
RUST
HEY! HOW COME IT DOESN'T GO? IT'S PHUKT!
OH NO! COULD IT BE THAT I JUST DONT APPRECIATE THINGS I DONT DESERVE?
LOUNGE BAR
I APPRECIATE THAT.

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Finish Line

So if the Silver Surfer teamed up with Iron Man, would they be alloys?

Romantic wordsmith

Wife: How would you describe me?
Husband: ABCDEFGHIJK.
Wife: What does that mean?
Husband: Adorable, beautiful, cute, delightful, elegant, fashionable, gorgeous, and hot.
Wife: Aw, thank you, but what about IJK?
Husband: I'm just kidding!
Br. Jookes

Science geeks have a sense of humour too

Molecule 1: I just lost an electron.
Molecule 2: Are you sure?
Molecule 1: I'm positive.
S. Hawking

Humour: not extinct

Q: Why shouldn't you make fun of a palaeontologist?
A: Because you will get Jurasskicked.
R. Geller

Don't stand so close to me

A teacher wanted to teach her students about self-esteem, so she asked anyone who thought they were stupid to stand up. One kid stood up and the teacher was surprised. She didn't think anyone would stand up so she asked him, "Why did you stand up?" He answered, "I didn't want to leave you standing there by yourself."
B. Simpson

Health food

My friend thinks he is smart. He told me an onion is the only food that makes you cry, so I threw a coconut at his face. **J. Oliver**

That's a bit harsh

Q: Which sexual position produces the ugliest children?
A: Ask your mother.
B. Willis

Some Chuck Norris love. We reckon a few of these will be changed to Marc Marquez jokes pretty soon...

How did giraffes come to be? Chuck Norris uppercut a horse.

Chuck Norris doesn't hang pictures he tells them to stay.

When Alexander Bell invented the telephone he had 3 missed calls from Chuck Norris

There used to be a street named after Chuck Norris, but it was changed because nobody crosses Chuck Norris and lives.

Chuck Norris doesn't call the wrong number. You answer the wrong phone.

Chuck Norris and Superman once fought each other on a bet. The loser had to start wearing his underwear on the outside of his pants.

Some magicans can walk on water, Chuck Norris can swim through land.

Chuck Norris can cut through a hot knife with butter

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N.C.B. Entitlement: ..... Yrs. Has bike been owned over 1 year? ..... YES ☐ NO ☐
Is bike fitted with an Immobiliser? YES ☐ NO ☐ Is Bike Garaged? ..... YES ☐ NO ☐
If YES, is Garage within boundary of home? ..... YES ☐ NO ☐
Is bike etched with Vehicle Identification Number? ..... YES ☐ NO ☐
Cover Reqd: ..... Third Party Only ☐ ..... Third Party Fire & Theft ☐ ..... Fully Comp. ☐
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